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READING, REPEATING, AND WORKING THROUGH: ON MAHDI AMIL'S THEORETICAL PRACTICE

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis examines the writings of Lebanese Marxist theoretician Mahdi Amil in order to constitute the *problematic* of his theoretical practice. It seeks to address central challenges facing conventional intellectual historiography of Arab thought by proposing a different method of engagement. By attempting to reconstruct Amil's concept formation through tracing his method and politics of reading across three different modes of engagement, I show that any study taking theoretical practice as its object of study must take theory seriously. This thesis bridges conceptual and historical analysis by engaging with various primary sources: Amil's published books, journal articles, and transcribed debates and talks. It also makes use of testimonies by people close to Amil. I argue that Amil's theoretical writings on *contradiction* and his theory of a *colonial mode of production* cannot be reduced to his critical engagement with French structuralism and historical epistemology on one hand, nor to Lebanese party politics and the Lebanese Civil War on the other.

CONTENTS

ABREVIATIONS

AHA ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Azmat al-Ḥaḍāra al-ʿArabīyya am Azmat al-Burjuwāzīyāt al-ʾArabīyya / ازمة الحضارة ام ازمة البرجوازيات العربية*. 5th ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1987.

BAH ʿĀmil, Mahdī. "Baʿḍ al-Afkār Ḥawla Kitāb 'Tarīkh al-Ḥaraka al-Ishtirākiyya fī Misr' / بعض الافكار حول كتاب 'تاريخ الحركة الاشتراكية في مصر'." *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 31, no. 10 (October 1972): 36–56.

CMP ʿĀmil, Mahdī. "Fī Namat al-Intāj al-Kūlūnīyālī / في نمط الانتاج الكولونيالي." In *Muqaḍimāt Naẓarīya li-dirāsat Athar al-Fikr al-ʾIshtirākī Fī Ḥarakat al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanī / مقدمات نظرية لدراسة أثر الفكر الاشتراكي في حركة التحرر الوطني*, 7th ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013.

FDT ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Fī al-Dawla al-Ṭāʾifīyya / في الدولة الطائفية*. 3rd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2003.

FF Hamdan, Hassan. "Frantz Fanon: National Liberation and the Social Revolution / فرانتز فانون: التحرر الوطني والثورة الاجتماعية." Translated by A. Sh. *Al-Ṭarīk: Fikriyya Siyāsiyya Faṣliyya* 78, no. 23 (2017): 60–84.

FMS ʿĀmil, Mahdī. "Fī al-Masraḥ al-Siyāsī / في المسرح السياسي." *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīya Siyāsīya* 32, no. 4 (April 1973): 129–41.

FTT ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Fī Tamarḥul al-Tārīkh: Makhṭūṭa / في تمرحل التاريخ: مخطوطة*. 2nd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013.

HKY ʿĀmil, Mahdī. "Ḥawla Kitāb 'al-Yasār al-Ḥaqīqī wa-l-Yasār al-Mughāmir' / حول كتاب اليسار الحقيقي واليسار المغامر." *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 29, no. 8–9 (1970): 63–93.

HMF ʿĀmil, Mahdī. "Ḥawla Manhajjay al-Falsafa al-ʿArabiyya wal-Falsafa al-ʿĀmma / حول منهجي الفلسفة العربية والفلسفة العامة." *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 27, no. 9 (October 1968): 30–48

HSF Hamdan, Evelyne. *L'homme aux sandales de feu / رجل في خفين من نار*. Translated by Roula Zoubiane. Beirut: Dār al-Farābī, 2018.

HTW ʿĀmil, Mahdī. "Ḥarakat al-Taharrur al-Waṭanī: Ṭabīʾatuhā wa-Azmatuhā / حركة التحرر الوطني: طبيعتها وأزمتها." *Al-Ṭarīk: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 45, no. 3 (June 1986): 31–68.

IFK ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Fī ʾIlmīyyat al-Fikr al-Khaldūnī / في علمية الفكر الخلدوني*. 2nd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1986.

ITM ʿĀmil, Mahdī. "Al-Istiʿmār wa-l-Takhalluf: Muḥāwala fī Fihm al-ʿIlāqa al-Kūlūniyālīyya / الاستعمار والتخلف: محاولة في فهم العلاقة الكولونيالية." *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 28–29, no. 8 (1968): 50–74.

ITN ʿĀmil, Mahdī. “Al-Istiʿmār wa-l-Takhalluf: Niẓām al-Intāj al-Kūlūniyālī / الاستعمار والتخلف: نظام الانتاج الكولونيالي.” *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 28, no. 5 (1969): 86–126.

LAP ʿĀmil, Mahdī. “Linīn wa-Ahammiyyat al-ʿAmaliyya al-Thawriyya fī Taḥqīq al-Nashāt al-Naẓarī / لينين واهمية العملية الثورية في تحقيق النشاط النظري.” *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 29, no. 1 (January 1970): 16–25.

MAQ ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Munāqashāt wa-Aḥādīth: Fī Qaḍāyā Ḥarakat al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanī wa-Tamayyuz al-Mafāhīm al-Mārksīya ʿArabīyan / مناقشات وأحاديث: في قضايا حركة التحرر الوطني وتميّز الماركسية عربيا*. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1990.

MES ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Hal al-Qalb lil-Sharq wa-l-ʿaql lil-Gharb?: Marx fī Istishrāq Edward Said / هل القلب للشرق و العقل للغرب؟: ماركس في إستشراق إدوارد سعيد*. 3rd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2006.

NFY ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Naqd al-Fikr al-Yawmī / نقد الفكر اليومي*. 4th ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2011.

NMS ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Al-Naẓarīyya fī al-Mumārasa al-Siyāsīyya: Baḥth fī Asbāb al-Ḥarb al-Ahlīyya fī Lubnān / النظرية في الممارسة السياسية: بحث في أسباب الحرب الأهلية في لبنان*. 3rd ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1990.

OC ʿĀmil, Mahdī. “Fī al-Ṭanāquḍ / في التناقض.” In *Muqaḍimāt Naẓarīya li-dirāsat Athar al-Fikr al-ʾIshtirākī Fī Ḥarakat al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanī / مقدمات نظرية لدراسة أثر الفكر الاشتراكي في حركة التحرر الوطني*, 7th ed., 23–293. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013.

PeP Hamdan, Hassan. “Praxis et Projet: Essai sur la constitution de l’Histoire / البراكسيس والمشروع: مبحث في تكوينة التاريخ.” Translated by Abdallah M. Ghattas. *Al-Ṭarīk: Fikriyya Siyāsiyya Faṣliyya* 78, no. 28–29 (2019): 47–58.

TKM ʿĀmil, Mahdī. “Al-Tamayyuz wa-l-Kawniyya fī-l-Mārksīyya al-Linīniyya / التميز والكونية في الماركسية اللينينية.” *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 32, no. 9 (July 1973): 9–36.

TP ʿĀmil, Mahdī. *Muqaddimāt Naẓarīyya li-Dirāsat Athar al-Fikr al-Ishtirākī fī Ḥarakat al-Ṭaḥarrur al-Waṭanī / مقدمات نظرية لدراسة أثر الفكر الاشتراكي في حركة التحرر الوطني*. 7th ed. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013.

INTRODUCTION

A. Fort-Da: One (Tragedy) Divides into Two?

Mahdi did not leave us. He is among us. He is still with us because his thought goes on in life. It resides in us and assists us with understanding the complex reality of our world. No, Mahdi’s thought was not embalmed [يتحنط], it cannot be fossilized [يتحجر], nor should it be enshrined/sanctified/sacralized [لا يجب رفعه الى مقدسه]. Quite the contrary, it must be taken as a fertile thought, capable of renewed conferment. It is up to us to keep Mahdi’s thought alive. This is why we must interrogate and develop it, to enhance it and refine it through confronting it with the questions of today and the issues of the present. But rather, we must make it the locus of inquest in order to substantially go beyond it, to exceed it, to traverse it. We must strive to [critique] it. This is how Mahdi remains perpetually existent and enlivened. This is how Mahdi accompanies us in his unceasing presence. – Evelyne Hamdan

With these opening remarks addressed to the youth of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), Evelyne Hamdan commenced a commemorative event at the LCP’s offices in Beirut. The event, held on the 18th of May 2018 and jointly organized by the LCP and the Centre Culturel Mahdi Amil – CCMA, marked the 31st year of the assassination of Mahdi Amil (1936-1987). The commemorative event was preceded by a two-and-a-half-hour radio broadcast on Sawt El-Shaab titled “Mahdi Amil, the Thinker and Human” consisting of three testimonies by three youth members of the LCP on the importance of reading and working through Amil’s thought, discussions with three guests on the relevance of his thought, and a brief interview with Evelyne Hamdan. The radio event concluded with a special rerun of an episode from Ziad Rahbani’s “al-‘Aql Zīna” radio broadcast that was originally played on the air three days following Amil’s assassination.[1] The three youth

[1] Ziad Rahbani, *Al-ʿAql Zīna* (Beirut: Sawt al-Shaab, May 21, 1987).

members spoke about the "challenging endeavor" of reading Amil's theoretical works and how it often warranted "reading several times." Some reflected over the "accuracy" of Amil's "specification of colonial society from classical capitalist society" and how it still holds true "30-40 years after," in addition to how it should "inform political action," but also be "critiqued and furthered."[2] The main discussant, despite recognizing the "unfinished" status of Amil's project, expressed less reservations of how Amil's conceptual apparatus could be implemented today to further political goals.[3] At the commemorative event, the main speaker gave a brief summary of Amil's theoretical trilogy and his later works on sectarianism in a lecture entitled "The Contemporary Relevance of Mahdi Amil's Thought" [راهنية فكر مهدي عامل]. The speaker made the call to return to reading Amil repeatedly in order to inform party practice. He did so without much qualification, for he claimed that Amil's work had a "complete Marxian formulation for class struggle." He went as far as saying that "Marx, Lenin, Engels, and other Marxists: none of them have a theory that is as complete and well-formulated as Mahdi. Mahdi gave us a complete and unparalleled account on class struggle." At the end of the lecture, a youth member of the LCP rose up, invoked his bond with the speaker in order to express that what would follow would come from a place of respect, and then spoke for more than ten minutes straight before being interrupted by groans in the audience (enough [khalas], thank you [shukran]). This person's intervention sparked the transformation of my research

[2] "Mahdi ʿĀmil: The Thinker and Human" (Beirut: Sawt al-Shaab, May 18, 1987).
[3] A few days prior, Lebanon held its general parliamentary elections which were originally scheduled for 2013 but postponed three times. Towards the tail end of the radio broadcast, the main discussant repeatedly attempted to connect Amil's analysis of class alliances and political ideology to LCP's relation to certain political groups despite the radio host's attempts at curtailing the subject. The same subject would be raised during the Q&A of the commemorative event.

objective from the question of the Colonial Mode of Production (CMoP) to one of reading and the thinkability (and 'historicity') of modes of politics. His response centered around three points:

1- That "the first thing Amil said was that there is no sacredness (qudsiyya) in anyone, yet we are looking for sacredness in the texts of the very person who said so"

2- The "qarʾana [sacralization; endowing an object with the status of the Qur'an] of Amil's texts" and the "transitive" use of Amil's concepts through out-of-context citation (iqtibās) and quotes (istishhād). He added that "[his] fear is of the 'qarʾana' of Amil and his thought" at a time when "even the Qur'an itself can handle interpretation, according to men of religion."

3- The "taking lightly (istishāl) of Amil's work by direct translation and borrowing" while paying no regard to Amil's "methodology" [manhajiyya]. He further gave the example of the disproportional amount of attention given to Amil's work compared to Hussein Mroue despite the latter's simpler language.

Crucially, Mahdi Amil was in this young man's position when he himself officially joined the ranks of the LCP and al-Ṭarīq in 1968.

Mahdi Amil was one of the partisan names of Hassan Abdallah Hamdan (1936-1987). He was a Marxist theoretician, university professor, writer of theoretical prose and poetry, and a member of the LCP. He lived and taught in Algeria (1963-1967) during its post-independence 'revolutionary' period, and upon receiving his PhD in philosophy from the Université de Lyon in 1967, he returned to Beirut following the 1967 Naksa. Amil contributed occasionally to al-Nidāʾ and regularly to al-Ṭarīq, and eventually (informally) joined the latter's editorial committee. He wrote two books of poetry (Taqāsīm 'alā al-

Zamān and Fadāʾ al-Nūn) and was active in Beirut's cultural and artistic scene.[4] He published all his books in Arabic – two of these books were translated into French posthumously. Today, several works of his are currently being translated into the English language; a project that Evelyne Hamdan sought to realize since shortly after his assassination (18 May 1987) and well beyond her untimely passing (May 2020). The *raison d'etre* of the CCMA has been to make Amil's work accessible; not to render him a monument of a 'colonial archive,' but to continue Amil's project of reading. Amil has been historicized in the annals of "Arab Marxism" and "Arab intellectual thought" as the chief philosophical helmsman of the LCP – particularly, the LCP of the Second Congress, of the national liberation movement, and of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). This, however, was not the case, at least in the days of the publication of his *Theoretical Prolegomena*. Several historiographical accounts have pinned Amil as "instrumental" to, or, having played an "important role" in, the Second Congress.[5] My conversations with Elias Shaker, chief editor of al-Ṭarīq and a contemporary of Amil, revealed an inconsistency; that "there is an exaggeration there."[6] My conversations with Youmna El-Eid, Lebanese novelist, literary scholar, and frequent contributor to al-Ṭarīq, and longtime friend and colleague of Amil, also revealed that his relationship to the party was not as 'organic' as some portrayals seem to indicate: "in the beginning, they did not approve much of his intellectual bases and focus […] it was a little too 'Western' to be considered 'pure

[4] Amil also wrote reviews of several plays, acted in two plays by Yaacoub al-Shadrawi, and was a regular at Dar al-Fan. Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[5] Samer Frangie, "Theorizing From The Periphery: The Intellectual Project of Mahdi ʿAmil," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 3 (August 2012): 465. Samer Frangie, "The Anatomy of a Crisis: On Mahdi ʿAmil's Naqd Al-Fikr Al-Yawmi," *The Arab Studies Journal* 24, no. 1 (2016): 147.; Fadi A. Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation*, 2020, 215n10.
[6] Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.

Marxism.'"[7] Amil's disagreements with the party persisted into the war, and though he was eventually praised, respected, and highly regarded, these tensions lingered even after the publication of both *Theoretical Prolegomena* installments. My conversation with Evelyne Hamdan, Amil's widow, as well as El-Eid and Shaker, also revealed an important disregarded dimension of his theoretical works, and particularly of the *TP*: they were not read or engaged thoroughly through Amil's theoretical edifice. All three of my interlocuters recounted different instances of Amil saying "ma byuʾrūnī!" [they are not reading my work!].[8] Another person, who wished to remain unidentified, reluctantly but emphatically mentioned that Amil once announced that "you need fifty years to understand what I am writing!" Elias Shaker did provide a nuanced account of this problem and gave several examples of party figures like Suhail Tawili who tried to intervene and remedy the situation. It is important to mention that engagement with his thought did take place, but El-Eid warned me not to be

> surprised that he felt he was not read enough or as should have been. He used to complain about that because he was difficult and ambiguous. Reading him…not anyone could do it. They later understood him and understood that what he was saying was not against Marxism – not against Marx, nor against Lenin.[9]

The point of the above examples is not to extricate Amil from the party; rather, it is to indicate that a proper investigation into his thought must proceed from the premise that Amil's thought and theoretical practice are neither reducible to the party nor to historical 'crises.' This is no secret. All the introductions to his *TP* convey a strong sense of

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[7] El-Eid, Youmna, Interview by author.
[8] Evelyne Hamdan added: "he used to live in this solitude. It used to bother him. He liked being able to discuss and debate with people, but he could not find people who were able to debate him in this." She did, however, mention that Tayeb Tizini was one of the few people who Amil found able to understand his work.
[9] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

bitterness over the lack of legitimation – by critique – of his conceptual apparatus. Still, however, both discourses, that of the party on the one hand, and of historiographic accounts on the other, seem to his thought, along with its internal problems, as part of interminable series of external crises. Instead of a thorough critique that aims to uncover the mistakes, problems, contradictions, falsities, shortcomings, incompatibilities, and downfalls of his thought, his work has been reduced to a party doctrine, faulted due to the historical contingencies of a time in 'crisis,' or relegated to the modernist dustbin of Western Enlightenment projects that have failed to conform to the position of *subject supposed to be postcolonial*. It is beyond the scope of this thesis project to engage in these debates at length, but I delineate them here in order to show that party discourse shares the very same grounds of some recent trends in intellectual historiography. The implicit formula set forth by contemporary intellectual historiography locates Marxist theoretical thinkers between a rock and a hard place.[10] On the one hand, they are reduced to a "tragic" victim whose very attempts at declaring themselves universal are dismissed as a cruel "inheritance of enlightenment […] a permanent part of what it means to be a conscript of modernity."[11] On the other hand, they are reduced to a psychological self-presence (under erasure)[12] whose position of enunciation is that of renunciation, disenchantment, melancholia. What appear to be two distinct accounts (sacralization, on one hand, and postcolonial *misérabilismes*, on the other), turn out to be the very same thing. In other

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[10] Alternatively, between a rock and a dinosaur. It has become commonplace in contemporary leftist discourse to refer to the post-1967 and pre-1990 leftist generation, particularly the ones still active within contemporary leftist political organizations, as 'dinosaurs.' Broad sweeping historicist generalizations precisely de-historicize.
[11] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2004), 175.
[12] Nick Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant*, frev (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 320n4.

words, each account of "tragedy" only sees itself from the tragic hero of their side (party leader or conscript). Both tragic heroes maintain their 'Oneness' by slaying the other one who is identified as introducing conflict. The blindness of this tragic perspective prevents it from seeing that the source of the conflict is not the 'outsider' but is itself the stage: "[t]ragedy cannot see that the crack that divides one and one is that which constitutes the stage. Tragic blindness is blindness to the perspective of the blind spot itself: the nonperspective of the crack."[13] Amil rejected claims of both the provincialization of knowledge and the attribution of 'backwardness' to thought in the Arab world. In 1974, he defended the use of reason against the growing sentiment that the cause of 'backwardness' is Arab culture: "[e]very false problematic leads to an inescapable predicament. This crisis takes the form of 'tragedy' between two difficult solutions." (AHA,[14] 145). In this light, the 'problematic' of this thesis needs to be constructed.

B. "Suʾālak Ghalat:"[15] The 'Problematic' of 'Problem-Spaces'

> Thought, in the capacity of thought, is determined, not through a metaphysical essence, but through the determinations of the problems it encounters: in the *problematic* specific to it, i.e. by the fusion of these problems within the structure and by the theoretical grounds from which it emerges and moves (AHA, 83).

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[13] Rachel Aumiller, "Twice Two: Hegel's Comic Redoubling of Being and Nothing," *Problemi International* 2, no. 2 (2018): 262.

[14] Mahdī ʿĀmil, *Azmat al-Ḥaḍāra al-ʿArabīyya am Azmat al-Burjuwāzīyāt al-ʾArabīyya / أزمة الحضارة ام ازمة البرجوازيات العربية*, 5th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1987).

[15] Hamdan, El-Eid, and Shaker shared stories of Amil responding using the expression "suʾālak ghalat" [your question is false] indicating that false questions yield false answers.

This project is about reading. Its direct aims are not to offer a reading to counter postcolonial historiographic interpretations,' it is even less so concerned with producing a different or more up-to-date reading to (god forbid) be put in the service of party practice today as a 'theory for militants.' Rather, it is about Amil's own reading: what he read, how he read and what he made of it, against what backdrop he read, and 'to what service' he read. This thesis project grew out of an interest in Amil's *Colonial Mode of Production* (CMoP), not as an analytic tool to theorize Arab society on its own terms today, but as a conceptual formulation that was cut from the same cloth as French structuralist anthropologists such as Emmanuel Terray, Claude Meillassoux, Pierre-Philippe Rey, among other theorists and anthropologists from Latin America. Amil, as it is often said, is a household name, but his conceptual apparatus is far from penetrable. The first of his texts that I attempted to read was his *Theoretical Prolegomena*. My attempts of reading it amounted to repeated failures. It was difficult and impenetrable, as many of the testimonies on the radio broadcast claimed. The intervention of the youth member at the LCP event not only shifted my main question, but also compelled me to put the *Theoretical Prolegomena* (TP) on the side. It was then by sheer accident that I stumbled upon Amil's 1985 text *On the Scientificty of [Ibn] Khaldūn's Thought* – a text that not only presents Amil's *problematic*, but also outlines his method of a symptomatic reading. My principal question transformed into reading methodologies (and politics) of reading.[16] This text, as I will

[16] Reading needs to be framed following Pierre Macherey: "We have to know how to make a page of reading correspond to this page of writing: in reading a piece of text, with eyes wide open, not to read between the lines, but to read what we are not accustomed to reading on these lines themselves, we have to try to see how the different levels, the different types of concepts, are materially arranged." See Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London ; New York: Verso, 2015), 185.

show in chapter 3, is fundamental for understanding Amil's 'early' works (TP) as well as his 'late' works (his critique of Said's Orientalism). My interlocutors have also attested to the absolute importance of Ibn Khaldūn to Amil's thought. I must also admit that my focus on reading was instilled by the repeated claims to its importance by the four interlocutors with whom I worked. Evelyne Hamdan generously gave me access to his library, shared with me stories and highlighted the importance of reading, and reminded me not to "reduce Amil to his background."[17] Elias Shaker insisted that I "read and deduce, instead of repeating or quoting what others are saying" and warned against "collapsing his thought to party politics."[18] Youmna El-Eid, to whom I am most grateful to in this regard, shared with me her personal notes from reading and copyediting Amil's manuscripts. She reminded me on several occasions not to "rush with writing, [to] take [my] time with reading," and again, "to read, take notes, and categorize."[19] My fourth and central interlocutor, is Mahdi Amil himself, whose thought, reading 'ethic,' and mode of politics are the central matters of this anthropological investigation. It has been remarked that in the practice of historicizing the thought of Althusser, whose thought informs that of Amil in fundamental ways: "the terror and lyricism of [his] work and life were turned into a humanist subject, contrary to his main writings."[20] Following this as a cautionary piece of advice, it is not my aim to write a psycho-biographical exposé of Amil, to speak about his intimate character,

[17] Evelyne Hamdan was clear in her disclaimers not to reduce Amil's thought to or against a culturally-determinant "culture of the south" or "Shiʿa culture" or to reduce that moment of "revolutionary struggle into a reaction." Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[18] Elias Shaker interview. Shaker provided me with a wealth of information on al-Ṭarīq, which was intended on materializing as a constitutive part of chapter 3. However, unfortunately due to AUB's Jafet Library's closure since October 2019, I was forced to take out these parts to publish them at a later date.
[19] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[20] Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen, *French Theory in America* (New York; London: Routledge, 2001), 201.

to praise or criticize his practices within the LCP, to assess or question the intentionality behind his political practice, or to engage in vacant discourses of triumphalism or defeat. The subject of this study is his thought – his theoretical apparatus and his distinct mode of thinking politics. Any attempt at engaging with Amil in the context of his daily life would flounder in comparison to the insightful and intimate monograph, published recently by his long-time lover and companion, Evelyne Hamdan.[21] She wanted to show those who knew Amil, the thinker, how "[h]e was in his daily life, how he thought, and how this was the thing that distinguished him from other people. In his daily life, when he cooked, or when he wrote, he was in this mode of thought."[22] Needless to say that such a project is not mine, nor could it ever be. With the sole exception of an incisive contribution by Nadia Bou Ali, no systematic engagement of his work has been carried out.[23] This thesis will not seek to critique his theoretical formulations but to expand on them, elucidate them, and try to grapple with the peculiarities of his theoretical practice and his prescriptive politics. In other words, my object of study (the problematic) needs to be formulated before any process of immanent critique could be carried out.

Amil was a reader of French structuralism (al-bunyawiyya) and historical epistemology, and many of his notions and concepts were adapted from these theoretical and scientific fields. However, Amil's engagement with this thought was not limited to the appropriation and application of notions or concepts of structure, mode of production, epistemology, conceptual apparatus…etc. Instead, he started off with a very specific

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[21] See Evelyne Hamdan, *L'homme aux sandales de feu / رجل في خفين من نار*, trans. Roula Zoubiane (Beirut: Dār al-Farābī, 2018). Hereafter HSF.
[22] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[23] See Nadia Bou Ali, "Mahdi Amel's Colonial Mode of Production and Politics in the Last Instance," *Critical Historical Studies*, forthcoming.

method of reading. This method was not limited to specific disciplines or theoretical fields and extended include his readings such as Fanon and Ibn Khaldūn. The outcome of this tedious process, which ensured for Amil a thorough systematicity, represented for many of his readers a "ruthless rigidity". Following Althusser, he did not conduct a hermeneutic or discursive superficial reading of texts, but a *symptomatic* reading where the primary objective of reading was to construct an unconscious of a text in order to expose its *problematic*. For Amil, notions and concepts cannot be treated in isolation from the theoretical and ideological framework in which they are produced, hence a "*problematic*." In contrast to a *problem-space*,[24] a *problematic* is not simply a worldview, nor a framing device for understanding the presence or absence of concepts in relation to an individual or epoch. A *symptomatic* reading seeks to identify the "paradox of *an answer which does not correspond to any question posed*."[25] It is about the

> production of a new answer without its question, and simultaneously the production of a new latent question resting invisible in the gap between the unasked question and the new answer…the [making of] '*a complete change in the terms of the*' original '*problem*,' and thereby produced a new problem, without knowing it.[26]

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[24] David Scott defines a 'problem-space' as "a context of argument and, therefore, one of intervention… An ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs… from within the terms of any given problem-space what is in dispute, what the argument is effectively about, is not itself being argued over." Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, 5.

[25] Slavoj Žižek, "Class Struggle of Postmodernism? Yes, Please!," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogies on the Left* (London ; New York: Verso, 2000), 90. Cited from Robert J.C. Young, "Rereading the Symptomatic Reading," in *The Concept in Crisis: Reading Capital Today*, ed. Nick Nesbitt (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 40.Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. David Fernbach and Ben Brewster (London ; New York: Verso, the imprint of New Left Books, 2015), 27.

[26] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 22.

Amil's thought, perhaps more than the thought of any other thinker in the region, cannot be examined without reconstructing his *problematic*.

As such, a generalized reading that places Amil in a survey of the thought of his generation of intellectuals risks decontextualizing and dehistoricizing his thought. Despite his Marxism and commitment to revolutionary emancipation, his thought does not share the same *problematic* as the others. To give a simple yet fundamental example of a major oversight in recent Amil scholarship: the notion "takhalluf" [underdevelopment, backwardness, retardation] increased in circulation, particularly after the 1967 defeat. However, Amil's very first article (1968) in Lebanon after his return to Beirut, was precisely a critique, not only of the term's implications, but of its scientificity. This critique not only transforms its definition in Amil's theoretical works from an understanding of "takhalluf" as economic "underdevelopment" or cultural "backwardness" to one of an *effect* (rather than a *product*), but it decenters its very position within his thought and his critical enterprise (from being a critique of "takhalluf" to critique using "takhalluf"). This is needed if we are to appreciate the difference of his treatment of takhalluf from those of the others. This transformation is crucial for understanding Amil's thought since its theorization is premised on a rejection of "underdevelopment"[27] and "dependency" theory. Amil was the sole critic of the term "takhalluf" in his time, but the scholarship on his work has failed to convey this very fundamental difference despite Amil's careful placing of

[27] Descriptions in historiographic accounts such as "underdevelopment is the direct product of imperialism" or the characterization of Amil's project as one oriented "toward an Arab theory of underdevelopment" precisely depoliticize Amil's claims. See Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabiʿ, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 324–26.

quotation marks around the word “takhalluf.”[28] The LCP is also guilty of such mistakes.[29] This is not to mention that Amil’s usage of concepts such as “structural causality” or “ideological state apparatus” was itself a critique of Althusser’s own usage and not a “creative reproduction.”[30] This thesis will deal precisely with the difference between ‘specification’ and ‘particularization.’ Other instances include describing his Marxism as “economist” for not being Hegelian, or claiming that he “reduces the religious to the ideological.”[31] Further instances include describing his Marxism as “economist” for not being Hegelian, or claiming that he “reduces the religious to the ideological.” [32] The same critique could be extended to seemingly innocent, simple, or general words such as “theory,” “practice,” “history,” etc. Perhaps the most pernicious historicist expressions of creative liberty are the ones that describe his project as (or, as part of) “Arab Marxism,” for Amil vehemently rejected the qualification of his work as one pertaining to ‘Arabs.’ Amil’s theoretical edifice was built on the relation between the *specific* [“mumayyaz” / “spécifié”] to the universal [“al-kawniyya”] – the former as the latter’s guarantor – through *specificity* [“al-tamayyuz” / “spécificité”] (ITM,[33] 53). Although Amil uses the French word “spécifié” (‘specified’ in English) and does not differentiation between specific and specified, Amil pitted his thought against the particularizing and singularizing tendencies

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[28] See, for example, Frangie, “Theorizing From The Periphery: The Intellectual Project of Mahdi ʿAmil,” 468.Frangie, 468.; Abu-Rabi‘, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 446.

[29] The jacket of the 3rd edition print of Amil’s book on Said frames his project as a “political philosophy” dealing with “underdevelopment.” Mahdī ʿĀmil, *Hal al-Qalb lil-Sharq wa-l-ʿaql lil-Gharb?: Marx fī Istishrāq Edward Said /* *هل القلب للشرق و العقل للغرب؟: ماركس في إستشراق إدوارد سعيد*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2006).

[30] Abu Rabih, p.324

[31] Abu-Rabi‘, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 324.

[32] Abu-Rabi‘, 343.

[33] Mahdī ʿĀmil, “Al-Istiʿmār wa-l-Takhalluf: Muḥāwala fī Fihm al-ʿIlāqa al-Kūlūniyālīyya / الاستعمار والتخلف: محاولة في فهم العلاقة الكولونيالية,” *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 28–29, no. 8 (1968): 50–74.

of postcolonial thought. ‘Specification’ and ‘distinguishing’ of the specific in Amil’s glossary needs to be thought only through the (Kantian) ‘dimension of the *practical*.’[34] His work strongly opposed particularization – Marxism neither carried a particularistic nor authentic ‘Arab’ identity. Moreover, by rejecting the developed / underdeveloped (as well as center / metropole, part / periphery, and first world / third world binaries), Amil not only refused to singularize colonial society but he denied an imperialist ‘West’ from occupying a position of universality. Additionally, Marxism for Amil was a science and not a philosophy, for only the former has objects, whereas the latter is an ahistorical activity of thought that is conditioned by class struggle though it cannot theorize politics. Amil expressed this distinction often, particularly in recognition of Lenin’s *practice* of philosophy.

While some errors and conflations are incidental, others are not so innocent. Readings, particularly generalized surface readings, are never innocent. They carry and convey the narrator’s own worldview. A historian does not necessarily have to subscribe to Amil’s thought or politics in specific, or Marxist thought in general, to recognize that Marxism for Amil was a universal science, and not a “discourse” or a “perspective.” Such a mode of analyzing intellectual thought not only disavows the (subject of the study’s) ability to exercise reason through uses of abstractions and claims to knowledge and truths, but also reduces the subject of such truths to a mere source of enunciation whose locution could be only thought of discursively and intersubjectively. A reading of Amil and his mode of thinking could in no way begin from a place of discourse. Not only did he maintain a sharp distinction between “theory” and “discourse” but the very grounds, the

[34] Peter Hallward, “The Singular and the Specific: Recent French Philosophy,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 99 (2000): 6–18.

very "soil" [turba], on which he wished to build his project was thought as irreducible to speech, language, locution, enunciation, representation, or discourse. This reluctance on Amil's part is not simply restricted to his situation, for many of the proper names associated with anticolonial struggles (whether in the Arab world, in the Caribbean, or elsewhere) were also *formal supports* of thought procedures of a certain *event* in the form of truths.[35] Their projects were much more than acts of "speaking," they were attempts at 'truth-procedures.' The foreclosure of rationality, coupled with the territorialization and provincialization of knowledge ("Western knowledge / epistemology" vs "Colonial knowledge / epistemology"), renders any project of reading Amil's thought (and consequently, his own reading) through the notion of 'problem-space' incongruous. In addition to disputing the claims of the territorial binary of "metropole/center" and "periphery/part," Amil made claims to universality, not as a neutral objective truth outside of a particular position, but a truth that could only be articulated from the position of an engaged militant partisan-subject. Amil's (Leninist) understanding of 'truth' entails that regardless of territories of 'problem-spaces' of knowledge, a singular universalizing act is what guarantees their conditions of possibility. For Amil, this truth was not a nominalist 'truth,' but a universal that is actualized (and distinguished) in specifics. As such, Amil's project (in tandem with many anticolonial figures) was not to claim that excluded peoples (a 'part of no part,'[36]) were absolute particulars, but the universal embodied.

The stakes of Mahdi Amil's thought for the discipline of anthropology are paramount. This basic recognition of a certain negativity of its 'subjects' contributes to its

[35] Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant*, 321n4.

[36] See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

secession from its neo-colonial enterprise. For a discipline whose foundations are built on such questionable colonial grounds (to study the 'particularities' outside of a European 'universal'), it would be antithetical to its renewed anticolonial commitments to disregard, not only the universal value of the statement (of the people), but also the universalizability of the place of its enunciation. So how could an anthropological investigation of emancipatory theoretical project of thought proceed without falling into the traps of historicism or depoliticization? It is possible if it recognizes that the place of enunciation can begin to function as the necessary space guarantying the universality of the statement.

Faced with similar concerns about studying the *problematics* of *historical modes of politics*, French anthropologist Sylvain Lazarus outlined a method of investigating the politics of the past as *intellectualities of politics*. Initially written and published in French under the title *Anthropologie du nom* (Anthropology of the Name) as a response to May 1968's intellectual caesura, Lazarus offers a different mode of thinking politics that is separate from history, sociology, and philosophy,[37] and not localized within post-Marxist dialectical anthropology or post-positivist structural anthropology.[38] Instead, Lazarus investigates politics as a thought *from within* by positing two axiomatic statements: *people think* and *thought is a relation of the real*. The first statement points to the indistinct and open category of 'people' (not to be mistaken for the categories of the 'working class,' '*the* people,' 'the masses,' or 'the subaltern,' and 'colonial') and to thought. The second statement locates thought in a "relation *of*" and not in a "relation *to*" the real – people do not think the real, it is the *identifier* of their thought rather than the 'object' of thought. He

[37] Sylvain Lazarus, *Anthropology of the name* (London; New York: Seagull Books, 2015), x.
[38] Alain Badiou, "Politics as Thought: The Work of Sylvain Lazarus," in *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 26.

breaks with historicist positivism to authorize the thinking of subjectivity (NOT '*in* subjectivity') without passing through objective mediations which would slip into a designation of thought devised on the basis of its supposed objects.[39] Lazarus upholds this distinction to maintain the consistency of the 'elsewhere'[40] (and its power) of people's thought as well as to uphold that a certain 'possible'[41] arises through their *problematic*. As such, the anthropology of the name is not a 'speculative exposé,' but an inquiry into how a thought of politics functions on the possible: "thinking thought, of implementing it, by its practice and its investigation, such a thought is possible."[42] Lazarus localization of *places* of *historical modes of politics* is to highlight the *prescriptiveness* of the thought through its *categories* in order to vouchsafe that the prescription is sequential (limited to the singularity of its prescription) and could only be read through its categories (in order to prevent de-historicization). Lazarus' project offers an extensive and novel method of investigating modes of politics and is valuable in thinking of thinking anthropologically. While Lazarus' project if evaluated through Badiou's reading could be beneficial for this project, it risks confining the scope of this project. Instead, I will pursue a different line.

Amil's thought (his *Theoretical Prolegomena* trilogy in particular) has proved troublesome and inaccessible for intellectual historians to map onto an ever-shifting political conditions. This is partly due, to the fact, that its development and gradual disintegration is more the effect of its initial premises than simply (and reductively) of a cultural and political situation. Amil's reminders that his theoretical project was inseparable from his commitments to party political practice indirectly resulted in

[39] Badiou, 27.
[40] Lazarus, *Anthropology of the name*, xi.
[41] Lazarus, xii.
[42] Lazarus, xii.

periodization accounts that confounded the unraveling of his conceptual apparatus with the defeat of Marxism and the left. The non-Marxist, postcolonial, and liberal accounts often locates the failure of Amil's project due to provincialism (an incompatibility between Western and Enlightenment thought with a local territory), on the one hand, and an experiential disenchantment (the disillusionment with defeat of the left in Lebanon as symptomatic of its defunctness globally) on the other. These lines accentuated its collapse at the cost of its own theoretical shortcomings, as well as, its gradual changes and enhancements. A more approbatory account reads Amil as a committed party intellectual whose theoretical wherewithal was able to revolutionize Marxism's historical mandate and distill an ABC's of party practice. The potential danger in both lines, whether laudatory or denunciatory, is that Amil becomes transformed into a 'great man' or a 'genius' that was once vulgarly attached to Lenin. The problem in this interpretation is that it reduces Amil's theoretical practice and political project into a variant of crude pragmatism. Against these lines of reading, my aim is to demonstrate two seemingly paradoxical arguments. 1- That his theoretical practice is not reducible to political practice in the war. 2- That his support for political practice in the war is inseparable from his theoretical enterprise and political singularity. This difference between lies in an *act*. What his detractors failed to understand was that, for him, it was the very gap between his Marxist theory and the event that embodied the universal truth of his theory. This was Amil's Leninist gesture – to repeat Lenin. The Bolshevik revolution resulted from a paradox. It was not expected to start from a 'backwards' country – nothing in Marxist theory justified it – yet this paradox presented an opportunity.

Amil's thought is neither reducible to an eclectic and incongruous "Arab Marxist" canon, nor reducible to a dreadful civil war that followed the writing of his *Theoretical*

Prolegomena. In other words, Amil's theoretical project (his theory) cannot be simply assessed by the events of the civil war, its outcomes in relation to the left, or the efficacy of the party to which he belonged (practice), and vice versa. That is not to say that "political practice," and its relation to "theoretical practice," was not a central component of his project – if anything, it was its core drive. Rather, what it means is that his "theory" of the prewar years and the party's "political practice" during the war are not conjoined as "practice of theory" in Amil's "theoretical practice." To collapse Amil's theoretical project (by way of divorcing the practice of thinking from the objective unfolding of the war) is to collapse the subjective and the objective. Amil said it himself. His conceptual formulation was not a sociological study of Lebanon, but "a theoretical study dealing with a conceptual reality that is not given" (CMP, 298).

C. Ṭarbūsh: Fathlaka Falsafiyya

> Reading […] is the primary methodological act of any historical anthropology.[43]

The very first thing Evelyne Hamdan said to me after inviting me to her apartment was "I am not a philosopher."[44] Just as she dropped this disclaimer – this "Ṭarbūsh"[45] – I was also following suit: "neither am I." Amil's thought, theoretical practice, and symptomatic reading might offer something to a practice of anthropology that is concerned

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[43] Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution. Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa Vol. 1h Vol. 1h* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 30.
[44] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[45] "Ṭarbūsh" here refers to editorial disclaimers featured on the first pages of controversial articles. Amil's first two contributions to al-Ṭarīq were published with disclaimers warning against his non 'traditional' Marxism. This will be discussed in the text.

with the question of reading. As (I hope) I have made abundantly clear, the intention of this thesis is not about generating a new triumphant historiography, nor about political refashioning. It is an anthropological inquiry (of the reading kind) into Amil's thought, but also into the discipline itself. It is inspired by the question of how to engage 'informants' in the field. I will let Amil 'speak for himself.' It could be said that this engagement is, in fact, a non-engagement – it is not a staged encounter between a wide-ranging discipline – whose modes of inquiry could sometimes regenerate its questionable colonial 'tradition' precisely through its attempt at avoiding them – on the one hand, and an anticolonial 'philosopher' on the other. It is not about the ambivalent question of anticolonial representation, nor is it a 'philosophical' engagement with anthropology. Despite his training in philosophy, Amil rejected the label of 'philosopher', and like the theoreticians of his generation, he recognized the inherent limits of philosophical inquiry for politics, and consequently drew on distant disciplines.[46] He mentioned anthropology and ethnography once, each in a separate place. He wrote the following on the subject of 'ethnography' in his book on sectarianism (1980):

> And to what extent did this archaeological thought flourish with the advent of imperialism, in the form of ethnographic thought [فكر اتنوغرافي] in the first half of this century, and to what extent did the peoples of entire colonial settlements [شعوب المستعمرات] suffer, without exception, in Africa, Asia, or Latin America? Did this thought not proceed in its abuse [شططه] to the extent of purging these peoples from the *circle of rationality* [دائرة العقل], when [this ethnographic thought] reduced [these peoples] to religious, magical, or mythical thought – as in illogical or irrational thought – and therefore all that remained was primitive thought, and this was the whole of their thought? This study is not the space of such scholarship, despite its importance… (FDT,[47] 62).

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[46] This is also due to Amil's Leninist gestures, which will be explored in the main chapters of this thesis. For more on this anti-'philosophical' development, see Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), 497–98..

[47] Mahdī ʿĀmil, *Fī al-Dawla al-Ṭāʾifīyya / في الدولة الطائفية*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2003).

He then proceeded by citing the kinds of this "imperialist bourgeois ideology" as the main culprit behind notions of Lebanese "'uniqueness'" ["الفرادة"] that were infiltrating the national liberation movement. Years earlier, he wrote the following on "anthropology" in his chapter on Lenin (1973):

> [A]nd therefore, Marxism became the sole scientific tool capable of understanding these stages of history, and therefore, understanding pre-capitalist societies. Hence, it could be said: Marxism is itself the science of history in general, and the science of history is the only social science. It is thus a critique of everything that appears in the guise of "the human sciences" from various contemporary ideologies. For the uneven development of Marxist thought in this field does not therefore indicate the failure of its contribution [تخلفه عن الإسهام] to the construction of these "sciences", or these ideologies, such as anthropology [الأنتربولوجيا] for example, or social psychology etc.…, but this lag [التخلف] – if found – would precisely be in its lack of critiquing these very ideologies on the bases that they are ideologies (TKM,[48] 13).

Amil's critique of anthropology, and its ethnographic shadow, is not unique – countless figures from within the discipline of anthropology and the practice of ethnography have expressed similar critiques.[49] Amil's critique cannot be lapsed into a supposed 'antihumanist' or 'structuralist' tradition, one whose implication is the wholesale disavowal of the human sciences. As I will show, he did draw on some anthropological literature. When writing on the relation of psychoanalysis to the human sciences, Althusser

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[48] Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Al-Tamayyuz wa-l-Kawniyya fī-l-Mārksīyya al-Linīniyya / التميز والكونية في الماركسية اللينينية," *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 32, no. 9 (July 1973): 9–36.

[49] See for example: Stanley Diamond, *Toward a Marxist anthropology: problems and perspectives* (Paris: Mouton, 1979); Dell H. Hymes, *Reinventing Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); David Seddon, *Relations of Production: Marxist Approaches to Economic Anthropology* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); Bob Scholte, *Structuralism and Marxism: A Debate* (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1972); James G. Carrier, *After the Crisis Anthropological Thought, Neoliberalism and the Aftermath* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016).; Maurice Bloch - Marxism and Anthropology: The History of A Relationship; Maurice Bloch (ed.) - Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology

recognized that Freud and Lacan separated psychoanalysis from seemingly proximate disciplines like psychology and instead tried "to attach it to disciplines that are apparently distant from it (sociology, anthropology, or ethnology)"[50] Elsewhere, Althusser credits the work of ethnology for revealing the important distinctions in different social formations: "We are beginning to suspect, even if it is only because of the works of contemporary ethnology and history, that this *society effect* differs with different modes of production."[51] This is precisely what the project of *symptomatic reading* offered to Amil – the imperative of *reading* and *separation*; namely, that to indicate that any given methodological "confinement" to an object of inquiry is premised on a necessary "*construction of its concept*, which presupposes a definition of the specific existence and articulation."[52] Calls for the distinguishing epistemology from methodology have also been voiced from within the discipline.[53] It is no surprise that for a figure like Amil, the question of how to think and theorize the mechanisms of theorization itself (i.e. how to theorize the tools which in turn allow for the theorization of the colonial encounter), preceded any other imperative (theorization of political practice, of the mechanisms of national liberation, and of a socialist revolution). Amil, much like Althusser before him, bestowed upon this practice of thinking the designation of class struggle.

At a specific juncture in time, he posed himself as a formidable challenger to the discipline. There was an indirect engagement (on the question of thought, Islam, and Arab culture) between him and a Lebanese anthropologist but it is not separate from Amil's

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[50] Louis Althusser, *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences*, 2016, 46.
[51] Althusser, "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy," 69.
[52] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 333. Emphasis is Althusser's.
[53] For example, "The concept of theory as method reduces a traditional role of theory as critique to the criticism of hypotheses." See Tim Ingold, *Key Debates in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 2006), 32.

moment of *prescription*.[54] However, many of the criticisms that Amil had voiced have surfaced from within the discipline. He challenged notions of 'cultural' othering and instead universalizes his position; he rejected any claims to primitiveness and located such discourse as a colonial remnant; he rejected the very premises of claims of 'Arab' underdevelopment, lag, or backwardness ["takhalluf"] and instead argues for a relation of differential articulation where "takhalluf" is not a product but an *effect* that manifests as 'backwardness;' he rejected the depiction of any "takhalluf" as a historical remnant and instead located it as a problem of the present; he rejected collapsing religion or sectarianism onto ideology and argued for a differential method of 'appropriating' tradition; he rejected historical, economic, ideological, political, or cultural determinisms of a simple kind and proposed a different mode of their combination; and so on… If there were ever to be a "studying up"[55] to counter elitism in anthropology, it ought not study the more powerful of society (for they are not any more 'whole' or 'rich' in meaning' than those on the 'margins'), but to study the discipline's own presupposed assumptions and definitions of 'culture,' 'knowledge,' or even, 'subject.' It is in this regard that Amil emerges as an *impossible* reader and critic of anthropology. He not only thought, wanted to be assessed based on the merit of his thought, upheld the axiomatic statement that scientific revolutions are non-reversable and thereby sought to break the 'epistemological

[54] Lebanese anthropologist Mohammad Hussein Dakroub (not to be confused with Lebanese literary critic Mohammad Dakroub) critiqued Amil on his position of thought and Islam. See Mohammad Hussein Dakroub, *Anthrūbūlūjiyā al-Ḥadātha al-ʿArabīya: Muntalaqāt Naqḍiya / انثروبولوجيا الحداثة العربية: منطلقات نقدية*, Dirāsāt al-Fikr al-ʿArabī (Beirut: Maʻhad al-Inmāʼ al-ʻArabī, 1992), 66–73. Years earlier, Amil critiqued the anthropologist in question for the latter's use of "nasaq" (NFY, 218-9n1 and 233-5n1).
[55] Laura Nader, *Up the Anthropologist Perspectives Gained From Studying Up*, 1972.

obstacles'[56] preventing theoretical practice, but above all, he dismissed the supposition that scientific practice is constituted through individual or 'group' endeavors. Indeed, his project was a theorization of the contours of how to abolish, through class struggle, what he called "thabāt fikrī" [intellectual stagnancy] (HKY,[57] 80).

It could be said that his *bête-noir* was not anthropology (as a science), but the dualisms of anthropology, which originated through enlightenment philosophies of the atomistic subject (*homo economicus* and *homo psychologicus*; in other words, the conscious subject its needs) and currently constitute the presuppositions of most academic disciplines in the sciences and humanities. Then came Marx's intervention: thought must proceed from material conditions – the presupposition ought not be Man or Consciousness. This is perhaps why Amil did read anthropological literature – some of its residues could be detected throughout parts of his texts[58] – but limited his focus to engagements within the discipline that sought to challenge the imposition of economic-juridical ideology onto pre-capitalist societies (studies of pre-capitalist MoP as opposed to investigations of rational or irrational behavior). Marx's break with these dualisms had left a mark on the discipline of anthropology, even within the post-dialectical and post-structuralist anthropological culturalist sphere, namely, the theoretical problematics indebted to bourgeois philosophies of history as grand narratives of progress. Such was also Amil's chief nemesis, yet while anthropology sought to resolve the problem of grand narratives of

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[56] Amil's debt to Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem is "incalculable." This will be explored in the first chapter.

[57] Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Ḥawla Kitāb 'al-Yasār al-Ḥaqīqī wa-l-Yasār al-Mughāmir' / حول كتاب اليسار الحقيقي واليسار المغامر," *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 29, no. 8–9 (1970): 63–93.

[58] Evelyne Hamdan confirmed that Amil did in fact read anthropological works including, but not limited to, authors like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Pierre-Philippe Rey, and Maurice Godelier. Some of these texts will be mentioned throughout this thesis.

progress through constructivism and relativism, he sought to theorize the complexity and variation of the colonial structure through distinguishing the process of uneven development of colonial conjunctures. Most importantly, Amil's project of theoretical practice was 'reflexive,' not because it foregrounded the category of the subject, but precisely because it sought to constitute the subject as the object of knowledge.

In this challenging light, the anthropological question remains: how could an anthropological investigation into Amil's theoretical conjuncture take place without slipping into contemporary crises of anthropology – crises that have assumed the form of various binaries: 'culture' (American) or 'society' (British); 'dark anthropology' or 'anthropology of the good;'[59] 'imperialist nostalgia'[60] or 'nativist anthropology;'[61] 'cultural (moral and cognitive) relativism' or 'scientific evolutionism;' 'descriptive integration' or 'comparative generalization;'[62] 'intellectualism' or 'reflexivity;' 'fieldwork as theory' or as 'straightjacket;'[63] 'social science' or 'humanities;' 'armchair anthropology' or 'participant observation' – or the polemical debates surrounding the need for the necessary separation (or demarcation) of the differential projects of 'anthropology' from 'ethnology'[64]? Far from downplaying the absolute *contemporary* significance of these debates for the

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[59] Sherry B. Ortner, "Dark Anthropology and Its Others Theory since the Eighties," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6, no. 1 (2016): 47–73. 3

[60] Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

[61] Vesna V. Godina, "Anthropological Fieldwork at the Beginning of the 21st Century. Crisis and Location of Knowledge," *Anthropos /* 98, no. 2 (2003): 473.

[62] Tim Ingold, *Anthropology Is Not Ethnography | Proceedings of the British Academy, Volume 154, 2007 Lectures* (British Academy, 2008).

[63] Josep R. Llobera, "Fieldwork in Southwestern Europe Anthropological Panacea or Epistemological Straitjacket?," *Critique of Anthropology Critique of Anthropology* 6, no. 2 (1986): 25–33.

[64] Tim Ingold, "Anthropology Contra Ethnography," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (2017): 21–26.

discipline – even Amil, following Hussein Mroue on ‘tradition’ and Althusser on ‘reading,’ viewed debates of a similar nature as ‘struggles of tendencies’ – the point is to delimit the space of this study to prevent the risks of a prevalent pastiche of equivocation and obscurantism from transforming the object of this study “into the study of its own ways of working.”[65] That is not to say that the method of this investigation does not advance certain claims – it certainly does, but only *negatively* and without seeking to produce any normative claims. These debates are fundamental, for their different historicities attest to the struggles and transformation of the disciplinary ideological and scientific stakes throughout its non-linear development.

Amil’s commitment to theoretical practice and the support of the LCP’s role in the civil war has been credited to justify two claims that are based on external causality and thus reduce Amil’s theory to pure external events and objectifies the war.[66] The obfuscation of internal changes and differences dehistorices and depoliticizes Amil’s theoretical practice. Amil’s first direct (non-negative) invocation of subject and object (of knowledge) was written four years into the civil war in an article titled “Theoretical Practice and Political Practice.” This text was one of the many writings where he expressed the importance of the war for socialist liberation, yet this text is not reducible to the war,

[65] Tim Ingold, “That’s Enough about Ethnography!,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no. 1 (June 2014): 383.

[66] For example: “‘Amil’s problematization of both the Marxist interpretation of and justification for the war amounted to questioning Marxism in its entirety. Hence, ‘Amil’s critique placed him in the opposing camp, namely the “reactionary right.” Or: “[a]ny critique of this position threatened a return to the local, one that was pre-theoretical and, therefore, pre-political. For ‘Amil, if Marxism had to remain in the war to survive, it also had to remain attached to the universal to exist.” And: “[h]is political commitment meant support of the civil war against all odds and his universalism a rejection of any appeal to culture whether national or religious. In many ways, ‘Amil’s defense confirmed the critics of Marxism in their portrayal of this ideology.” Frangie, “The Anatomy of a Crisis: On Mahdi ʿAmil’s Naqd Al-Fikr Al-Yawmi,” 156, 159, 162.

since, even more remarkably, his *prescriptive* starting point (as early as 1967) was not only what Althusser warned against,[67] but what Althusser eventually turned to towards the end of his career: theory should not break from ideology but should act upon ideology in its very efficacy as ideology.[68] Amil was barraged with accusations of being an Althusserian (which he completely disavowed) and a structuralist (which he labeled a “bourgeois technocratic current” for the foreclosure of the prospect of class struggle in its asceticism and theoreticism (HKY, 91-2). However, his treatment of structure, apart from the role that history played within it, was not consistent, and was often self-contradictory. Amil’s theoretical writings began from the concept of ‘structural causality’ in order to prescriptively theorize ‘class struggle,’ despite his later claim that the displacement of class struggle constitutes the very grounds for structuralism’s inability to properly understand structures (FTT,[69] 52). Althusser, too, was criticized by his detractors for his philosophy’s inability to produce anything beyond its continual refinement. Althusser’s later “self-criticized” works precisely “undo the object he constructed.” Is Althusser’s ‘philosophical death-drive’ reducible to the unfortunate death of his wife? Slavoj Žižek writes:

> If […] we account for this 'will to self-obliteration' in the simple terms of the unfortunate theoretical effects of a personal pathology – of the destructive turn which finally found its outlet in the murderous assault on his wife – we miss the point true as it may be on the level of biographical facts, this external causality is of no interest whatsoever if we do not succeed in interpreting it as an external shock that set in motion some inherent tension already at work within Althusser's

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[67] “No doubt I did speak of the union of theory and practice within 'theoretical practice', but I did not enter into the question of the union of theory and practice within *political practice*.” Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, Radical Thinkers (London ; New York: Verso, 2005), 15. Emphasis is Althusser’s.
[68] Etienne Balibar, “Althusser’s Object,” trans. Margaret Cohen and Bruce Robbins, *Social Text*, no. 39 (1994): 176.
[69] Mahdī ʿĀmil, *Fī Tamarḥul al-Tārīkh: Makhṭūṭa / في تمرحل التاريخ: مخطوطة*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013).

> philosophical edifice itself. In other words, Althusser's self-destructive turn ultimately had to be accounted for in the terms of his philosophy itself…[70]

Needless to say, to study Amil's theoretical objects, his theoretical project should be afforded no exception. The theoretical stakes of his project before the war cannot be reduced to its stakes throughout the war, nor can its internal errors be dismissed. In other words, Amil's 'objects' did not only change because of the irruption of the war, but because his very treatment of them necessitated their undoing or alteration. Étienne Balibar's intervention into how to periodize the transformations of Althusser's thought exemplifies the need for different methods of engagement:

> For these grand alternatives, which have little by little become "Althusserianism's" banalities, let us try to substitute a more refined approach: that of the unceasing *displacement* of an object of thought which quickly reveals itself to be irreducible to the theses in which it was initially presented. From which will follow *several phases* in which the word break will not produce exactly the same theoretical effects. I will distinguish five of these, including a "before" and an "after" that are perhaps the crucial moments.[71]

In order to preserve the traces of Amil's production process from both extremes (pure internality or externality), an exercise in reading must *suture* both dimensions. The excluded externality always leaves its traces. For the purposes of this research: first, the research will proceed in the modest 'non-place' of thinking. Thinking, not as a 'place' or 'conferrer' of meaning or symbolism, but of politics – politics itself as a form of thinking.[72] The implication here is that thinking and acting – much like theory and practice – cannot be separated. This position was upheld by Amil, who himself, following

[70] Slavoj Žižek, "De Capo Senza Fine," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogies on the Left* (London ; New York: Verso, 2000), 237.
[71] Balibar, "Althusser's Object," 161.
[72] Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 18.

Althusser and others, dismissed the possibility of separating those two spheres. Second, the object of this investigation, Amil, will not be reduced to the function of an "ego,"[73] but will be the support of a minimal anthropological subject of politics[74] and of *acts* – that is to say, of a subject engaged in struggle. Third, this thesis will not attempt to crudely locate Amil's thought against a backdrop of a positive account of a 'culture' of theoretical practice. Rather than proceeding positively by positing definitions, this study will proceed negatively by delineating the web of Amil's conceptual apparatus in order to explicate the stakes. Culture, as I will show, occupies a central place in it. Fourth, this thesis is not a 'theory' text – it is a 'method' text – but a 'thick description' of theoretical and political practice through reading and writing. Fifth, the empirical objects of this study (Amil's books and journal articles) will enable 'interlocution,' but the real object of inquiry does not reside in these empirical objects. In other words, I will begin with the question of reading and writing in order to reflect on the traces of the dead letter, the voice, and acts. This will be supported by discussions I have held with Evelyne Hamdan, Youmna El-Eid, and Elias Shaker. Sixth, antagonism, contradiction, negativity, and negation will be the narrative devices, without which any potential "radical negativity"[75] in Amil's thought yields to de-historicization and depoliticization.

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[73] Amil critiques Edward Said for reducing 'Orientals' to the "ego," collective thinking into the "superego," and feelings, affects, and senses to that of the "id" in Orientalism (MES, 46).
[74] See Nina Power, "Towards an Anthropology of Infinitude: Badiou and the Political Subject," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 2, no. 1–2 (2006): 186–209.
[75] Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 62.

D. Between the Universal and the Specific

> Writing, from its origins, up to its last protean techniques, is only something that is articulated as the bone of which language is the flesh.[76]

In May 1981, Clifford Geertz gave the bicentennial address under the title: *The Way We Think Now: Toward an Ethnography of Modern Thought* at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. As the title suggests, Geertz proposed a new ethnographic edifice: "[i]t is that, then – how the presented diversity of modern thought is to be itself understood – that I want now for a bit to pursue."[77] He duly made the objects of such an investigation "the representation of authority, the marking of boundaries, the rhetoric of persuasion, the expression of commitment, and the registering of dissent." He then fell into the nominalist trap of overlooking the necessary antagonism that he diagnosed, not on the account of him being wrong, but for being (partially) right. To elaborate, Geertz gave the example of where the prospective of such an undertaking undesirably "gets political" through "an uneasiness expressed in a number of not altogether concordant ways: as a fear of particularism, a fear of subjectivism, a fear of idealism, and, of course, summing them all into a sort of intellectualist *Grande Peur*, the fear of relativism." He then asks, "[i]f thought is so much out in the world as this, what is to guarantee its generality, its objectivity, its efficacy, or its truth?"[78] For the purposes of this research, one needs to reconfigure the order of the triadic assembly diagnosed by Geertz, for isn't the mark of

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[76] Jacques Lacan, Seminar XVIII On a Discourse that Might Not Be a Semblance. Cited from Nadia Bou Ali, "The Fate of Everything That Is Written," *Lost Cause ("Repetition/s")*, S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique, no. 10 & 11 (2018): 166.
[77] Clifford Geertz, "The Way We Think Now: Toward an Ethnography of Modern Thought," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 35, no. 5 (1982): 19.
[78] Geertz, 21–22.

struggle against false 'universals' – whether anticolonial in the Caribbean and, as I will show, in Amil's politics – precisely not the regression into, or the affirmation of, a particular position based on certain 'values' or 'roots'? Rather, it is a short-circuiting act – an act which finds infinitude within finitude by cutting across the particular and universal – where at the price of the demise of this particular, a 'subject' acts as a formal support allowing a universal to 'cast their essential light on the world.' In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon demonstrates, if not *prescribes*, this very mechanism:

> In no way does my basic vocation have to be drawn from the past of peoples of color
> […]
> It is not the black world that governs my behavior. My black skin is not a repository for specific values. The starry sky that left Kant in awe has long revealed its secrets to us. And moral law has doubts about itself.
> As a man, I undertake to risk annihilation so that two or three truths can cast their essential light on the world.
> […]
> Is it my duty to confront the problem of black truth on this earth, this earth which is already trying to sneak away?
> […]
> Must I confine myself to the justification of a facial profile?
> […]
> There should be no attempt to fixate man, since it is his destiny to be unleashed.
> The density of History determines none of my acts.
> I am my own foundation.
> And it is by going beyond the historical and instrumental given that I initiate my cycle of freedom.[79]

What Amil attempted to demonstrate was, in a way, the inverse of Fanon's proclamation where the concrete becomes the inherent truth of this universal. Instead of its opposite, the place of the specific becomes the necessary gap capable of guarantying this universality. In both cases, the constitution of this 'subject' comes into being only *through*

[79] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, 1st ed., new ed (New York : [Berkeley, Calif.]: Grove Press ; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008), 201–5.

the process of militant activity and *after* de-specification. Amil's practice of writing is less concerned with language, and more with acts, political prescription, science, and truth-procedures. To reduce his writing and theoretical practice to a question of translation, language, or textuality – following the ethical turn in literary and cultural studies[80] – in a culturalist commitment to an infinite ethical task of inventorying an endless and diverse forms of particularities, would precisely deny the truth of desire (in a universal sense) and erase the 'singular and symptomatic site of its appearance.'[81] This is precisely why this project cannot confine itself to the parameters of Geertz's ethnography of thought which explores "how meaning in one system of expression is expressed in another – cultural hermeneutics, not conceptive mechanics."[82] Geertz was correct in dismissing 'metalanguage' but unless language is thought of as an object-language, it will inevitably fall back into the 'objective' distance position of metalanguage.[83] This separation of writing from discourse is important for understanding an important shift in Amil's oeuvre that crystalized in his *Naqḍ al-Fikr al-Yawmī*. In this highly polemical book, which was written throughout the civil war, Amil argued against those who sought to "politicize literature or literary criticism [as a way to] instrumentalize it as a political discourse. It is a

[80] Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), 301.
[81] Bosteels, 236.
[82] Geertz, "The Way We Think Now: Toward an Ethnography of Modern Thought," 19.
[83] "Whenever the split between being and appearance is denied, you can bet that one particular inscription is being overlooked: that which marks the very failure of metalanguage. Language speaks voluminously in positive statements, but it also copiously speaks of its own lack of self-sufficiency, its inability to speak the whole unvarnished truth directly and without recourse to further, exegetical speech. Some elision or negation of its powers writes itself in language *as* the lack of metalanguage. This negation is no less an inscription for its not being formulated in a statement, and the being it poses presents no less a claim for our consideration." See Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, 2015, 9.

discourse that only manifests in the guise of literature or literary criticism by precisely repressing politics. This is the undertaking of a relationship between literature and politics [that assumes] an external relationship between them" (NFY,[84] 53).

In his extraordinary critique of postcolonial theory, Peter Hallward writes that instead of a confusion of spheres, "political principles which, while specific to the particular situation of their declaration" must, nevertheless, be "*subtracted* from their cultural environment."[85] Amil, who located the socialist revolution within 'anticolonial' struggle, did not maintain moral or pragmatic positions. The *prescriptive* politics of Amil relied on a confrontation of two contrary opposites [نقيضين] – a "manichean" division of class struggle (colonial bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and revolutionary forces, on the other) – which necessarily excluded a 'middle' or 'third.' Events of politics for him were no longer issues of cultural expression, social change, economic development, but the necessary fusion [inṣihār] of all spheres (political, economic, and ideological). Prescriptive politics excludes any middle positions and becomes brutally simplified as a matter of yes (revolutionary) or no (counter-revolutionary).[86] Far from discarding culture, the question of how to *appropriate* (a materialist tradition in) culture and Arab tradition occupied a principal place for Amil in fighting bourgeois ideology (which instrumentalizes 'authenticity' [aṣāla]). Therefore, to investigate the 'cultural' within this political sequence the question regarding the culture concept must necessarily become one of neither de-culturalizing politics nor of politicizing culture, but of de-'culturalizing' culture. Andrew

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[84] Mahdī ʿĀmil, *Naqd al-Fikr al-Yawmī / نقد الفكر اليومي*, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2011).
[85] Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific*, Angelaki Humanities (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 126.
[86] Peter Hallward, "The Politics of Prescription," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 774–75.

Sartori's necessary intervention – by way of an intellectual history of the culture concept – into historiographical and anthropological treatment of the culture concept.[87] 'Culture,' then, becomes a "*subjective moment* of capitalist society—a category that is at once inadequate insofar as it is posited dogmatically and positively (without mediations), yet irreducible insofar as it names a crucial moment of social reproduction" – it designates a moment of a sociohistorically constituted subjectivity.[88]

Culture is not the cause of a symbolic organization that expresses some interior richness of meaning which necessarily exceeds its symbolic articulation. Rather, it is an effect of the deadlock of finding a signifier to mask a traumatic kernel. Culture is what emerges to fill this void.[89] Culture – regardless of all attempts of self-reflection, particularization, or endless differentiation – confirms no authentic or 'proper' relation between people and their time. To quote Rancière: "[t]o explicate a phenomenon by referring it to 'its time' means to put into play a metaphysical principle of authority

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[87] Starting from contrasting Bengali "culture" against a wide source of varying humanistic and anthropological notions of culture, Sartori extricates the culture concept from the shackles of its signifying faculty within linguistic differences and specific discourse formations and locates it within social relations characteristic of abstract structures of modern capitalist society – the commodity form. See Andrew Stephen Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*, 2008, 21–22.
[88] Sartori, 232–33. Sartori's project also aimed to discredit an ongoing assumption within postcolonial theory: […]we must first find a way to displace the practical agency of colonial discourse from the position of explanatory primacy that it holds in the literature of postcolonialism. In the wake of the achievements of postcolonialist criticism, the aim cannot be to deny the constitutive effects of discourse. Rather, this book attempts to address a logically prior problematic: the historical constitution of the conditions of possibility for the power of specific discursive repertoires in specific historical contexts.
[89] Lenart Kodre, "Psychoanalysis for Anthropology: An Introduction to Lacanian Anthropology," *Anthropological Notebooks*, no. 1 (2011): 62.

camouflaged as a methodological precept of historical inquiry."[90] Coevalness[91] is inherently out of joint with itself. There is no 'cultural particularity' – only specific sociohistorical manifestations, that risk turning into violent positivist and presentist essentialisms if untethered from a universal. Moreover, there is no singular 'self.' A subject is inherently a divided subject and cannot be confined within the speaking ego. Self-reflexivity can therefore not be a guarantee of a return to a unity. Rimbaud's words still hold true: "Je est un autre."

While the culture concept cannot be generalized, on the one hand, or particularized and untethered from its mediation within global capital, on the other, it is indispensable. In this thesis, culture will not be limited to discernable positive meanings. Instead, it will open itself to thinking, not only attempts of making sense of capitalist modernity, but at the same time, the sites from which the proliferation of meaning fails in trying to cover up the inability of identification. In other words, to understand a specific culture, the question should revolve around what is dislocated in that culture – what is *disturbing* it.[92] Sartori argued that in order to understand "inherent contradictoriness in nationalist thinking," the question of contradictions need to be foregrounded.[93] What his view offers is the revelation

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[90] Moreover: "the limit of this mode of thinking can be found in extreme instances like historical revisionism; i.e., that which cannot conform to a legitimate time could not have occurred and therefore never existed." Jacques Ranciere and Davide Panagia, "Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Ranciere," *Diacritics Diacritics* 30, no. 2 (2000): 122.

[91] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, 2014.

[92] Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 6–7.

[93] "But if we then go on to understand this appearance as grounded in contradictions *internal* to capitalist social forms (as expressed in the particular context of this kind of colonial society), we can instead recognize that the double bind of nationalist thought is really only a specific instance of the more general condition of criticism in the age of capital. In other words, anticolonialism's organic connection to colonial categories of thought should be read as an invitation or provocation to *immanent critique,* where

of the *problematic* of the antinomical pair of liberalism and culturalism that historiographic accounts perspicaciously diagnose in their characterizations of "secular vs religious critique" and "socialist vs national." However, as Sartori demonstrates, the problem of culture does not transcend the specific moment but is itself the displacement of antagonisms *inherent* to the social (and cultural) formation *within* global capitalist modernity. This thesis will task itself with the question of concept formation. For example, the question of cultural (as well as economic) "takhalluf" will occupy a central place in the diagnosis of pre-1975 writings. Amil's category of truth necessitated *separation* and delinking of the social texture in order to reveal what notions of 'Arab' or 'colonial' categories displaced. In his notable book on revolutionary commitment and disenchantment in Lebanon, Fadi Bardawil contrasts his method from that employed by Yoav Di-Capua.[94] Instead of foregoing theory for a historical narrative in Arab thought, Bardawil opts to maintain the tension between narrative and theory.[95] This study will proceed from the obverse side: it will let Amil's concept formation be the guiding thread of narrating the situations of theoretical production as well as setbacks. While this study will revolve around a specific mode of politics, Amil's consciousness is not accessible nor representable.[96] Rather, a return to the theoretical and intellectual writings is needed.

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critique's condition of possibility is generated from within the social order that it takes as the object of its criticism." Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*, 16–17.

[94] Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation*.

[95] Bardawil, 12.

[96] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2012), 94.

This thesis will attempt to study this political singularity through Amil's writings from his days in Algeria till shortly before his assassination in 1987. The aim is not to present normative claims about the validity of this *act* or to assess its efficacy. Rather, it is to cross-examine a political moment of *prescriptive* theoretical practice between truth-procedures, a fidelity to the Event, and '*désastre*.'[97] To redeem Amil's theoretical practice from fatalist readings that teleologically inscribe it within the war and its outcome, as well as to maintain the integrity of his theoretical apparatus through an interrogation of its structure, this thesis will periodize it along three non-chronological and non-sequential 'situations:' reading, repeating, and working through.[98]

In chapter one, I begin from the question of imaginary identification and symptomatic reading. In the first part, I begin from Amil's troubled relationship with the 'name' of structuralism and Althusser, as well as, Amil's contestations and challenges to invocations in the 'name' of structure. Amil received a plethora of endearing names as well as insulting ones. He also was uncomfortable with some names that was ascribed to him. Through the stories that my interlocutors recount of his names, pseudonyms, and partisan names, I ask the question: *what's in a name?* Then I proceed by reading Amil's own symptomatic reading of Marx, Engels, Sartre, Fanon, Lenin, Mao, Bachelard, Canguilhem, Poulantzas, Balibar, and most importantly, Althusser. I explore the proximity, as well as

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97 «Mieux vaut un désastre qu'un désêtre» Alain Badiou, Conditions. For a succinct elaboration of Badiou's quote in relation to the Bolshevik revolution, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), 59.

98 This is allegorical appropriation of the three concepts forming Freud's analytic process: remembering, repeating, and working through. I will not be placing Amil on the analyst's chair, rather I will show how he occupied the analyst's position who had to deal with resistance in each phase. See Sigmund Freud et al., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume 12, 1911-1913, Volume 12, 1911-1913,* 1958.

the difference between Amil and Althusser's theoretical enterprises. With the help of Evelyne Hamdan, Youmna El-Eid, and Elias Shaker, I place Amil's readings against historical events and processes such as Nasserism in Beirut; Algerian decolonization as well as its socialist revolution; the 1967 Arab defeat by Israel; Parti Communiste Français (PCF) debates in Lyon; and the 1968 protests in France. I also present Amil's interventions in Lyon (underground and illegal fund-sourcing for Algerian militants); Algeria (teaching and debates); and Beirut (arrival to Beirut and some engagements with al-Ṭarīq and the LCP). These readings will be placed under five central concepts: science, "takhalluf," ideology, epistemology, and politics to demonstrate the 'determinate' transformation of antagonism in Amil's practice from one of critique [naqd / نقد] to one of determinate contradiction [naqḍ / نقض]. In the concluding section, I will reflect over how Amil's project of reading, as a scientific party practice, was met with resistance for lacking a symbolic context and an attachment to a past.

In chapter two, I deal with Amil's principal theoretical works: his doctoral dissertation; his seminal – very first published writing in Lebanon – two-part essay "Al-Istiʿmār wal-Takhalluf"; the two official installments of his *Theoretical Prolegomena*, as well as his abandoned, posthumously published, third installment. I begin from his days in Lyon and carry on with help from Evelyne Hamdan, through his time in Algeria and finally in Lebanon. In this survey, I reveal the transformation entailed in his 'repetition' of Althusser's symptomatic reading of Marx on the question of the mode of production (MoP). Starting from Amil's dissertation, I focus on his call for an epistemological break with Soviet and humanist Marxism. In the "Takhalluf" essays, I explore his theory of an extimate (colonial) relation that parts ways with mechanistic and expressive causalities in favor of structural causality. I expand on the two installments of his *Theoretical*

Prolegomena (TP):[99] *On Contradiction* (OC)[100] and his *Colonial Mode of Production* (CMoP).[101] Then, with the help of Elias Shaker, I delve into the problems in the reception of his work. I start from his first contribution in al-Ṭarīq, which was tossed out for being written in French and continue through to the (non)-reception of his TP before the war. The trilogy was written in order to lay the theoretical framework for a scientific theory that could inform the question of 'transition' in practice by engaging in national liberation that would lead to a socialist revolution. Amil wrote the first two parts of this work between 1968 and 1971, and put the third on hold on hold two years before the civil war. In this light, I give the abandoned third installment *On the Periodization of History* a (totally) new reading: its abandonment, in favor of more direct engagement, represents the very *negation of the negation* of the trilogy's triad. Across these sections, I attempt to show the transformation and enhancements of his theorization, as well as the reception of his work

[99] In order to specify which text I cite from the *Theoretical Prolegomena*, I opted to reference each of the two parts, including their introductions, separately. The in-text citation (TP) will exclusively refer to the introduction to the third edition. Mahdī ʿĀmil, *Muqaddimāt Naẓarīyya li-Dirāsat Athar al-Fikr al-Ishtirākī Fī Ḥarakat al-Ṭaḥarrur al-Waṭanī / مقدمات نظرية لدراسة أثر الفكر الاشتراكي في حركة التحرر الوطني*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013).

[100] The "(OC)" abbreviation references part one (*On Contradiction*) of the seventh edition (2013) of the *Theoretical Prolegomena*. Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Fī al-Ṭanāquḍ / في التناقض," in *Muqaḍimāt Naẓarīya li-dirāsat Athar al-Fikr al-ʾIshtirākī Fī Ḥarakat al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanī / مقدمات نظرية لدراسة أثر الفكر الاشتراكي في حركة التحرر الوطني*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013), 23–293. I exclude its final eighth chapter "at-Tamayyuz wa-l-Kawniyya fī-l-Mārksīyya al-Linīniyya" (TKM), as well as the article "*Ḥawla Kitāb 'al-Yasār al-Ḥaqīqī wa-l-Yasār al-Mughāmir'*" (HKY) which I cite from their versions which first appeared in al-Tarīq in order to preserve the original emphasis.

[101] The "(CMP)" abbreviation references part two (*On the Colonial Mode of Production*) of the seventh edition (2013) of the *Theoretical Prolegomena*. Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Fī Namat al-Intāj al-Kūlūniyālī / في نمط الانتاج الكولونيالي," in *Muqaḍimāt Naẓarīya li-dirāsat Athar al-Fikr al-ʾIshtirākī Fī Ḥarakat al-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanī / مقدمات نظرية لدراسة أثر الفكر الاشتراكي في حركة التحرر الوطني*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2013). I exclude the three articles featured in its appendix: part one (ITM) and part two (ITN) of "*al-Istiʿmār wa-l-Takhalluf*" and "*Baʿd al-Afkār Ḥawla Kitāb 'Tarīkh al-Ḥaraka al-Ishtirākiyya fī Misr'*" (BAH) and I cite the original al-Ṭarīq versions instead.

by members of al-Ṭarīq and the LCP. In the concluding section, I attempt to demonstrate the centrality of Althusser's concept of *society effect* to Amil's work and therefore try to place his work in a different light.

In chapter three, I analyze Amil's symptomatic reading of Ibn Khaldūn in his short book *On the Scientificity of [Ibn] Khaldūn*. This book was published in 1985, ten years into the civil war and two years before Amil's assassination. Amil, who is heavily influenced by Khaldūn, never published on the latter anywhere else. The figure of Ibn Khaldūn was to Amil what Machiavelli was to Althusser. Ten years into the advent of the civil war – after the exhaustion of the left started to become evident – Amil published this short book concomitantly with another book critiquing Edward Said's Orientalism. The terror of the civil war saw many ex-militants and intellectuals become disillusioned with Marxism. The prevalent discourse rescinded to one that oscillated between nativism (Islamism) and culturalism (liberalism). While the book on Said received substantial attention, the book on Ibn Khaldūn did not enjoy any recognition. This chapter will read Amil's return to Ibn Khaldūn as a 'working through' of the epistemological obstacles appearing as resistances of materialism. It was not only a continuation of Amil's project of *reading* a materialist tradition in Arab thought, but it was a gesture of *repetition* – of returning to square one. It became evident for Amil that all that was left was the question of *knowledge effect*. The two books – the one Said and the one Khaldūn – represent Amil's return *ideological effect* and *scientific effect* respectively. Therefore, they cannot be read separately.[102] I will conclude this introduction with a line from one of Amil's introductions that is fitting in relation to the three chapters of this thesis:

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[102] I had intended on writing an entire section on Amil's contributions to al-Ṭarīq, particularly on the question of Arabization, education, culture, and tradition. However, due

> Each text is established through its reading: [it becomes] differential, tangled, contradictory, and becomes. This text has [...] more than one possible reading. Not only because of its reader, but also because I purposely built it on three interrelated, interlinked levels, each of which enables a reading that is different from the other, which it invokes (NMS,[103] 5).

to the advent of the October 17, 2019 national uprising in Lebanon, and the imposition of lockdown in response to an ongoing global epidemic, I could not write this section without meetings with Elias Shaker and access to the periodicals housed at the American University of Beirut.

[103] Mahdī ʿĀmil, *Al-Naẓarīyya fī al-Mumārasa al-Siyāsīyya: Baḥth fī Asbāb al-Ḥarb al-Ahlīyya fī Lubnān / النظرية في الممارسة السياسية: بحث في أسباب الحرب الأهلية في لبنان*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1990).

CHAPTER I

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

A. What's in a Name?

Je suis « une vie qui crie sa contradiction. »[104]

What's in a name?
That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet[105]

Thus spoke Juliet on one Shakespearean eve. A Capulet or a Montague, hyphenated, or none all the same. All names are inscribed within a social order and expose a political dimension. Names belong to groups, cultures, traditions, genealogies, and places, yet Juliet's question offers two divergent interpretations on the truth or falsity of names, but also, to the couple's despair, unearths an impossibility. On the one hand, Juliet's plea rejects the notion that names carry an essence: a name is just a name. On the other hand, the social order represented in the name deems the couple's relationship untenable: a name is more than a name and must therefore be changed. The politics of the name lying in the middle of their love reveals the impossibility of an exit from the regime of names. Names disclose a dimension of the Other, the incorporeal Excalibur of its magistral sovereign. One is born into the world already having been named and will perish

[104] Translation: "I am a life that screams its contradictions." Evelyne Hamdan excerpts this line from a letter that Amil sent his sister from Lyon on 19 November, 1956. (HSF, 92).
[105] "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet; / So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd, / Retain that dear perfection which he owes / Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name; / And for that name, which is no part of thee, / Take all myself."

with their name long outlasting them. This raises the question on the status of this unfreedom to choose one's name – and which is instilled by the rule of the Other – when one takes up another name, a pseudonym. Is the Other foregone or is it still there in the attempt of emancipation from the Name of the Father?

Mahdi Amil was one of the multiple pen names that Hassan Hamdan used to sign his works. While Hilal Bin Zaytoun was the moniker Hamdan associated with the works of poetry he published, Mahdi Amil was the name reserved for the political and theoretical works he published. This name long outlived its bearer, yet, his given name was not the only name he received, for Amil's writings invited a plethora of other names. Despite all of Amil's attempts, names returned with more sacrilegious fervor every time: a "muḥarrif" (vulgarizer), a "foreign thinker," an "anti-humanist," a "naqīḍ" (contrarian), a "structuralist," an "Althusserian," and decades after his death, the "Arab Gramsci,"[106] and a "prophet." Hamdan joined a roster of modernist militants who rejected their names for others, yet this simple act of negation is, in Amil's case, doubled. Not only did he reject his own name, but he also rejected the name of a disputed theoretical tradition: structuralism. The name Mahdi Amil lies at a curious intersection of modernity, a signifier without a signified; structuralism, a theoretical movement "born out of the entrails"[107] of its times; and a partisan pseudonym promising a rebirth. What can an investigation into the politics of the name teach us about the conjuncture of these three elements?

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[106] According to Evelyne Hamdan, Amil was given the Arab Gramsci title during his days in Algeria. Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview with author.

[107] "How could the revolution be pure, for it is born out of the entrails of modern times, soiled by it […]" is a prominent line by Amil that has been copiously quoted.

1. In what vile part of this [modernity] / Doth my name lodge?

The pseudonym is a humorous combination of two seemingly incompatible, if not contradictory, figures – it is a structuralist gesture par excellence in its stressing on the relation rather than the elements themselves. The first name Mahdi is common proper noun coming from Shiite Islamic eschatology. The 'Mahdī' is the absented 12th Shiite imam who will not manifest himself until the end of time, promising upon his resurgence long-awaited justice and renewal.[108] Evelyne Hamdan refers to Mahdi Amil's playful self-designation by the name of the long-awaited prophet as "wearing the mystical [Sufi] aura" through a sardonic gesture of self-mockery (HSF, 438). Soliciting further commentary on this peculiar gesture, Evelyne said that although Amil considered himself to be "tasked with a mission;" he did not want to be "the thinker who sits in the ivory tower," and the appeal to the mysticism of the Mahdi was "taken in an ironic manner."[109] Yet apart from the sound value of the name, the unease produced by the pseudonym lies in the *real* of the name which conjures up an enigmatic substance – a phantom or an "aura."[110] This unease could be the effect of the intervention in the singular substance of the ineffable figure of the Mahdi that threatens to dispossess its originary proprietor's claim to it. The act of disavowal is not in the mere appropriation of the name – for names are not unique – but it is in the logic of overidentification that upon embracing and replicating the name it

[108] Evelyne Hamdan mentioned, in both the interview and the biography, Amil's influence on Henry Corbin's works on Shiite culture. Amil was heavily influenced by *En islam iranien* (1972) & *Au paus de l'Imam Caché*, (1964), the later of both which was "underlined and then placed in the hands of Hassan by Henry Corbin himself." (HSF, 461n35 & interview with author).

[109] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview with author.

[110] Mladen Dolar, *What's in a Name?* (Ljubljana: Aksioma - Institute for Contemporary Art, 2014), 34.

attaches itself onto, it threatens to disavow that unnamable "aura" from that name.[111] The undermining in the move lies in the cloning of the notorious name itself, a signifier of the bearer of the ruling order. In this gesture, the universality of the Mahdi would be coopted by his materialist doppelgänger, "the 'ʿĀmil,' the worker, the [real] savior […] who destroys the prophet,"[112] and thus the proletariat would declare itself as the one true universal class.

The laicization of the Shiite prophet is not without the perils of its unintended inverse effect – the sanctification of the profane and consequentially the consecration of the specific act of subverting the figure of the prophet – for the belief in the existence of common prophetic figure dictates that the precondition of superior knowledge is passed onto this figure exclusively through contact with God. In the history of Islam, there is no greater example than Mohammad's consecration of the prophetic 'insight' pre-Islamic poetry into the noble by ridding it of its irreligiosity.[113] A secular, yet still theologically-impregnated, example would be the "great man theory" which attributes historical change to the unique talents or "genius" of individuals. Amil actively denounced such echoes within the Lebanese left who was asking for "another Marx, or another Lenin, as in a 'genius' individual to lead the liberation movement to its socialist end, as in the most difficult difficulties in this are based on the presence or absence of this executing

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[111] Dolar, 35.
[112] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview with author.
[113] The Valley of 'Abqar was frequented by pre-Islamic poets for insight. It is believed that the source of early Islam's hostility towards poets lies in the common assumption that these pre-Islamic poets were establishing contact with devils in order to return with rich poetry. Similarly, the revelations of the Qur'an came to Mohammad through his monthly visits to a cave in Mount Hira. However, instead of devils, what legitimized Mohammad's prophethood was the bestowal of the holy prose through the angel Gabriel. Isam Al-Khafaji, *Tormented Births: Passages to Modernity in Europe and the Middle East* (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 124n12.

individual" (TKM, 14-5). However, the distance between the holy prophet and his subversive mimetic double is a close one that it risks undermining the attempts of subversion and thus renders the gesture arrogant (something Evelyne vehemently rejected)[114], or worse, iconophilic.

The peculiarity of the name is incomplete without the surname Amil, which according to Evelyne, "embraces [Amil's] project in its entirety with powerful brevity" through the "contradiction in the name" (HSF, 437). Amil has a dual meaning, a "humble laborer, who partakes in revolutionary solidarity in the struggle of national liberation of Arab people"(HSF, 438) and "Jabal Amel [Amel Mountain] and to all surrounding mountainous areas in the city of Nabatieh in South Lebanon" (HSF, 461-2n36). Evelyne detects a "connaissance" [double knowledge] of heart and mind in Amil's relationship to Jabal ʿĀmil (HSF, 71-2n8), which parallels Amil's early article on Fanon where he praises duality of the latter's writing which speaks to the heart and to the mind (FF, 62). This points to another possible problematic – that names are like imperfect imitations, for if names were assessed against the degree of their likeness to the object they correspond to, then what are the risks of these names appearing as perfect imitations? When I asked Evelyne Hamdan about the reasons Amil chose the surname Amil, her response was prefaced with a warning: "people think it is a form of religious belonging… it is, in fact, a cultural affiliation."[115] Evelyne is wary of the religious meaning that the name invites. A nostalgic culturalist and essentialist reading might attempt to retroactively render the name as one emerging from a certain 'nature.' Her worries are of today's historiographic

[114] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview with author.
[115] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview with author.

attempts which, in their search for cultural meaning, read the relationship of imitation as a perfect doubling.

The real of the name is revealed once more through the unpredictable entanglement of sounds and meaning in the erratic nature of language.[116] In this marriage of episteme and poetics, a homology to the Freudian unconscious appears, with the condensation of erratic truth through punning, homonymy, and synonymy.[117] Is not the connaissance of heart and mind an homonymous play of different words (ʿĀmil, the worker, and [Jabal] ʿĀmil, the origin of the Hamdan family) which contingently sound alike yet still presuppose the dissemination of meaning?[118] This is not to mention the one expression previously used to disrepute political, economic, and social demands from Shiite dominant communities, and was adopted by communists from Shiite areas: "Shīʿī-Shuyūʿī" [Shiite-Communist].[119] The facile pun of two words sharing similar assonance was used in the eulogy Mahdi Amil gave after Hussein Mroue's assassination: "From the south you originated, and you propelled the south and the thought of the south, and said: Ye intellectuals, unify against tyranny, and let your words be your weapons. You are the pens of the working class. Is that why they murdered you, because you are the Shīʿī-Shuyūʿī?"[120]

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[116] Dolar, *What's in a Name?*, 23–24.
[117] Dolar, 24.
[118] Dolar, 24.
[119] Silvia Naef, "Shīʿī-Shuyūʿī or: How to Become a Communist in a Holy City," in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political Culture* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 255.
[120] An extract of Mahdi Amil's eulogy to Hussein Mroue. See "Soura lel-Shahid Hussein Mroue Kama Rasamtha ʾaqalam al-Kuttab wa-Bayantahom," *Al-Ṭarīk: Revue Culturelle* 46, no. 3 (1987): 103.

2. [Structuralism,] Tis but thy name that is my enemy

> One day, in the beginning of the sixties, Sartre referred to structuralism as the most recent form of imperial bourgeois ideology. He might have been right. (MES,[121] 69)

In addition to the pseudonym Mahdi Amil, there is another name of interest. This name spread controversy and was disowned among its chief proponents: structure [bunya]. Names do not adequately describe the set of properties of the object to which they refer.[122] Contrary to accusations against structuralism as an anti-humanist, universal, anonymous, non- and anti-subjective entity upholding the domination of structures over humans, the etymology of the word *structure* evokes the withering away of what is solid and sturdy in the structure. The term stems from the Latin "*struere* / *structum*," which is to build and construct.[123] Other words like construct, destruct, restrict, and deconstruct stem from the same root. Its morphology is a future active participant; semantically, it points to the future – to something that is yet to come, something not yet solid, an agency to build something in the future. Its future perfect temporality points to *something that will have been*. Dolar further reminds us that its both nature and culture share the same etymological "quirk" as both nature (something to be born) and culture (to cultivate, something that will be

[121] ʿĀmil, *Hal al-Qalb lil-Sharq wa-l-ʿaql lil-Gharb?: Marx fī Istishrāq Edward Said / هل القلب للشرق و العقل للغرب؟: ماركس في إستشراق إدوارد سعيد*.

[122] This is perhaps best portrayed in a Polish anticommunist joke that Slavoj Žižek shares in several of his publications. "Socialism is the synthesis of the greatest achievements of all previous modes of production: from [pre-capitalist] tribal society it takes primitivism, from the Asiatic mode of production it takes despotism, from antiquity it takes slavery, from feudalism it takes the social domination of lords over serfs, from capitalism it takes exploitation, and from socialism it takes the name." Slavoj Žižek and Audun Mortensen, *Žižek's Jokes: (Did You Hear the One about Hegel and Negation?)* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014).

[123] Mladen Dolar, "What, If Anything, Is the Big Other?" (Fail Better, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2019).

cultivated in the future) point to a future participle of the verb to-be – they are unfinished projects."[124] Structure, nature, culture do not refer to things that are, they contain a promise for the future – of something that is yet to *have happened*.

In its high moment, structuralism had its proponents, who imposed it as an objective scientific mode of thought, as well as its censors, who resisted it for being "arid, obscurantist and inhumane (and also foreign, having apparently been made in Paris)."[125] Structuralism's anti-humanist claims – perfectly exemplified in Althusser's scientific re-reading of Marx which was intended to combat the French Communist Party's soviet, humanist deadlocks – casted fear and doubt in the supporters of the soviet party line. It comes as no surprise that Amil's allusions to structuralism triggered similar responses. It was only a few years before his first contribution to al-Ṭarīq that one of the journal's regular contributors traveled to the Soviet Union to interview Jean-Paul Sartre.[126] Due to structuralism's radical claims, the method and corpus of ideas of structuralism were "obscured or distorted by the emotions aroused by the mere name."[127] However, it is not the real or imaginary properties associated with the name of structure that arouse suspicion. The name is not merely an empty wrapper which does not refer to anything outside of the traits it bundles.[128] Instead, it is this unnamable enigmatic property that is irreducible to any of its traits (rigid, anti-humanist, iconoclastic), and which cannot be captured by the name alone. This phantom is an "ineffable being without properties, a

[124] Dolar.
[125] John Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 17.
[126] Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Sleiman, ..."...With Jean-Paul Sartre / ...مع جان بول سارتر," *Al-Ṭarīq: Siyāsīya Shahriya* 23, no. 7 (1964): 11. In the next section of this chapter, I share a joke mentioned by Elias Shaker that perfectly captures the fear of 'French' theory as opposed to Soviet Marxism.
[127] Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 17.
[128] Dolar, *What's in a Name?*, 29.

nothing which nevertheless appears as something, it never goes up in smoke by reduction to descriptions, it persists in its nothingness and provides the pure stuff of fantasies."[129] All this said, Sturrock reminds us that

> a great many of those who concern themselves professionally with the study of structures have felt no need to call themselves Structuralists nor to advocate something called Structuralism as their preferred method of carrying on their researches. Structuralism, unlike structures, is a localized phenomenon, a movement which only explicitly took root in a limited number of academic disciplines: in linguistics first and foremost, in social anthropology, in historiography, in literary studies, and in other disciplines taking their lead from these. […] All this has already altered and will continue to alter the way in which Structuralism is perceived. It has worked to break up any lingering appearance of solidarity in the philosophical or intellectual positions of the thinkers involved, who even in their lifetimes disliked being grouped together, being especially wary of accepting the label of Structuralist because of the restrictions it seemed to set on their thought. [130]

When I pushed Youmna El-Eid to indicate the possible reasons that she and Amil were distrusted, the conversation went as follows:

> Let me tell you why. Structuralism works on the level of system/structure – on the level of "ʿanāṣir", "ʿanāṣir al-bunya" (elements of structure) – whereas Marxism works on the level of classes. They are not necessarily opposed …unless someone remains a structuralist. For example, I worked structurally. I adopted the system/structure and its elements. What are its elements? If he [Amil] took the "ʿanāṣir al-mukawwina" [constitutive elements], which are the working class and the ruling class and so on, then you can say he is being a structuralist from Marxist grounds. Whereas some of them remain on the level of these elements. Still…I went back to the source, the social reference. He returned to the working class. And he did not approve of their [detractors] "iʿtirāḍ" (objection). He thought he was more Marxist than they were! I think… worked on the level of elements, but he was not a structuralist. There are two forms of structuralism. For example, you work on the relationship of the novel with the narrator, the narrator with the subject, with time, location…these are elements for the novel. He worked on levels […] maybe the elements of society, the working class. He treated them in relation to one another, because he did not enter the economy, the economic level. He worked on the political level. Maybe that's why I am saying that they left him with the disclaimer.[131]

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[129] Dolar, 31–32.
[130] Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 19–20.
[131] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview with author.

Both Amil and El-Eid encountered resistance for venturing beyond orthodox Marxism in their respective works. Some resistances were more peculiar than the others. An interview that El-Eid had with the Lebanese public national television channel Télé Liban (TL) on her work in 2015 is worthy of note. The interviewer posed a question to El-Eid about her beginnings in thought, and just as she was starting to answer and explain her use of "structure," the interview was abruptly cut without any attempt at a smooth transition or pretense that the answer ended. This interruption, or silence, ironically signals once again this ineffable enigmatic substance which refuses to come to the fore. To persist in trying to understand why few people did call themselves structuralists, despite the prevalent use of structural concepts, would at this point be a fruitless act of inquiry. Instead, it would be more constructive to think of a shadow of structuralism that answered to the name – of a structuralism that saw no need to do so. This does not discount the historical dimension that might have kept some thinkers from publicly identifying as structuralists. It opens a possibility of regarding the ones who saw no need to answer to the name structuralism as having enriched the work of ones who answered to the name.[132]

3. Deny thy father and refuse thy name

> [T]he logic of "negation" [rafḍ, رفض] came as a revolution against the father it was incapable of emancipating itself from. (AHA, 110)

Both Louis Althusser and Mahdi Amil took on structuralism, enriched their work with it and in one way or another contributed to it, but they 'exonerated' themselves from

[132] Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 22–23.

their involvement with the school. Their unceasing negation of the name points to the universality of being on the receiving end of a name, beyond the specific historical contexts of which they were each a part. Names exert a strange power which incites a response – one can embrace a name, repudiate it, but one can never be indifferent.[133] Names that refer back to a tradition often imbue the people they implicate with an afterlife marked with an undertaking. Even in death, the name of the father exerts control. If the name symbolically survives death, if not symbolically immortalizes itself, then the only course of action for repelling the mandate of its shadow is symbolic death[134] – death resulting from the castration of the father, the slicing off of his name. For both Althusser and Amil, the dangers of being read within the genealogies of the works they are attempting at 'working through' risks flattening the negativity of their thought. The efficacy of their commitments to offering novel readings hinges on maintaining their distance from what they're 'negating.' In contradistinction to imitators who rose to fame by inscribing themselves within a symbolic legacy that is not theirs, Althusser and Amil recognized the unease of inhabiting a name illegitimately and built their projects by going against the grain. This meant that they both doomed themselves to an eternity of negating other thinkers whose work was approximate to theirs, as well as of negating the proximity of their own works to those with similar usages of standard concepts to the ones they employed. Theirs – Althusser and Amil – was the costly tax of secondary reading in the form of occupying the very place of negativity. Althusser denied, despite terminological similarities, his usage of "combinatory," as well as, "primacy of the economic," and

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[133] Dolar, *What's in a Name?*, 35–36.
[134] Dolar, 51.

"overdetermination," among others, as being akin to any "structuralist ideology."[135] Amil similarly distinguished his own usages of the terms mentioned above, in addition to many others, from "structuralist ideology" (HKY, 91):

> […] this theoretical mistake in itself is [one] aspect of bourgeois ideological domination, that tries to penetrate into Marxist thought through the structuralist ideology." A much more somber Althusser writes in his autobiography that "the greatest philosophers were fatherless, and lived out their lives in the solitary realm of their own theory […] I did not have a father and continued indefinitely to play the role of 'father's father' to give myself the illusion I did have one, or rather to assume the role in relation to myself.[136]

The name of the father does not lie in biological parental authority nor does it lie in a "vile" body part, as what Romeo in the play fruitlessly contemplated doing: "Tell me that I may sack / The hateful mansion."[137] To insist on a relationship of immediacy is to err, as is it to scrutinize Amil's relationship with his absent father and caring mother (HSF, 69n2-4). Althusser writes in his memoir:

> [i]t was as if I had been destined to achieve [being one's own teacher in philosophy] by fulfilling the pure desire of my mother, which I had finally come to experience as the negation of that desire... In these circumstances, how could I not give my thinking the abrupt form of a break or rupture?[138]

In the case of Amil, this abrupt rupture was with the system of laws and traditions holding back Arab society. This law of the father is omnipresent in 20th century biographies of Arab writers.[139] For Amil, this rupture entailed the double process of reviving an Arab

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[135] Alfred Schmidt and Jeffrey Herf, *History and Structure: An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: MIT Press, 1983), 82. For more of Althusser's critique of structuralism, and in particular Claude Lévi-Strauss, please see "On Levi-Strauss" in Louis Althusser, François. Matheron, and G. M. Goshgarian, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966-67)* (London: Verso, 2003).
[136] Louis Althusser, Richard Veasey, and Douglas Johnson, *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 170–71.
[137] Dolar, *What's in a Name?*, 60–61.
[138] Althusser, Veasey, and Johnson, *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, 174.
[139] Naef, "Shī'ī-Shuyū'ī or: How to Become a Communist in a Holy City," 266-7n48.

materialist tradition through the introduction of epistemological breaks (while negating its non-materialist trends), as well as making use of various materialist theoretical traditions (while negating any authority they might have espoused over him). Preferring the use of terms such as "naẓariyya" [theory], "nazʿa" [trend], "tayyār" [current], and "fikr" [thought], Amil's negation of philosophy was not limited to structuralism, but to philosophy in general. This position was not at odds with what was commonly practiced by the "structuralist school" itself.[140]

Given names are generic and they are inscribed in cultural codes. A change in name brings forth, not only a symbolic death, but also a symbolic rebirth. A conversion to a new name entails "a new birth, a baptism, a metamorphosis," where the symbolic mandate lies in an elected (in Amil's case, partisan) name, irrespective of what official documents might state.[141] Hassan Hamdan's rebirth as Mahdi Amil is inscribed within the culture of militant partisanship. Evelyne Hamdan notes that the pseudonym Mahdi Amil was attached to Hassan Hamdan and his writings to such an extent that people often referred to him by his pseudonym as opposed to his given name. This act of naming predated the publication of his more principal publications and has continued to the present day (HSF, 461n32). Evelyne expressed that Hassan "identified with [the pseudonym], without separation, throughout the years […] to such an extent that the pseudonym became part of [Hassan]."[142] Hassan Hamdan is not alone in his identification with a partisan name; he joins a long list of militant figures who have been immortalized by their adopted partisan names rather than their given names: Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Tito…etc. However, Hamdan

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140 Lotringer and Cohen, *French Theory in America*, 125.
141 Dolar, *What's in a Name?*, 52–55.
142 Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview with author.

had two different names, one for the sphere of politics (Mahdi Amil) and another for the realm of poetry (Hilal Bin Zaytoun) (HSF, 437). His establishment of a parallel symbolic space was not delimited by one name for all spheres of his activity (poetry, political mandate, and the intimate)., but rather, the two names corresponding to the two realms, together, came to rupture the symbolic mandate of the given name. Evelyne refers to the symbolic relation of these two names (and spheres) as an "oblational fusion" like "hypostasis"[143] (HSF, 437). Surprising as this theological allusion may sound, it is worth considering for it reveals, in its biblical dimension, the prolongation of the act of naming.[144] The new adopted name comes to reside at the apex of the symbolic network, facing the other two.[145] Throughout the war, a third name was assumed during his field service to the party: Comrade Tariq [Rafīq Tariq]).[146]

The relationship between "Mahdi" and "Amil" is a negative one and it produces negative effects. Just as an identity of an entity is divorced from its traits and unequal to itself,[147] so do the mythological figure of the "Mahdī" and the "ʿĀmil" (the laborer), not only contradict each other, but undo themselves. The task of this 'savior' thought is to undo itself from within and render itself non-existent. The task of the worker is to liberate himself from the fetters of colonial capital. As Evelyne Hamdan eloquently puts it:

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[143] Hypostasis in Christian theology is the unity of the three figures of the trinity in the single person of Christ, as differentiated from the other two (HSF, 461n33).
[144] Assuming a new name carries biblical dimensions for it prolongs the sources of naming back to Adam and Eve's inception and falling from heaven.
[145] Dolar, *What's in a Name?*, 54–55.
[146] Mohammad Dakroub, "مهدي عامل: المتعدد / المتميز / الكوني," *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīya Siyāsīya* 46, no. 3 (1987): 6–19.
[147] With the Saussurian revolution, words can no longer be described independently from the structure in which they are constitutive elements. Words are therefore devoid of any ontological weight. Since elements have no positive properties, they are driven by pure differences. Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 8.

> [Amil] took the two contradictory (al-naqīḍatayn) words, where the one contradicts the other: the worker who acts, not just the one who thinks, but who produces, which he connected it with the word al-Mahdi, who had a mission. He put them together so that one destroys the other and something new is created.[148]

One only needs to add that the two words do not only contradict each other, but that they must negate themselves.[149] Another conclusion to be drawn from the structural negativity in the adopted partisan name: if the only consistency is the necessary differential relation it has with the other names, then the moment every element is, if it is a non-entity in itself, then the moment it is realized, it is completely contingent. Yet, the moment it is contingently realized, it is the bearer of a necessity. Evelyne continues: "For [Amil]: [the] struggle to be liberated from the battle of colonialism"[150] is a marriage of the contingency and necessity of intellectual and manual labor, a marriage of socialism and anti-colonialism, a marriage of history and structure, a marriage of "theoretical practice" and "political practice" which is signified by the name.[151]

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[148] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview with author.

[149] Further, Evelyne wrote: "what is the object of the contradiction in [Amil's] name, if not a reminder of [his] determination in becoming the thinker of the present, who closes the loop, as [he] like[d] to say and repeat, between "theoretical practice" and "political practice," in the necessity of each one for another, in the field of the liberation movement, in its revolutionary perspective and its dimensions. And on this basis, [Amil] could not but respond to those confused, who ask about the meaning in [his] name, through a smile charged with cunning and quip!" (HSF, 438).

[150] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview with author.

[151] Evelyne forefronts Amil's philosophical aim of dissolving the representational mediation between "theory" and "practice" in the biography. She writes about him and to him posthumously, "[y]ou are the Amil/worker, the humble laborer, who partakes in revolutionary solidarity in the struggle of national liberation of Arab people. And what is the object of the contradiction in your name, if not a reminder of your determination in becoming the thinker of the present, who closes the loop, as you like to say and repeat, between 'theoretical practice' and 'political practice,' in the necessity of each one for another, in the field of the liberation movement, in its revolutionary perspective and its dimensions. And on this basis, you cannot but respond with a smile filled with cunning and quip to those confused people who ask about the meaning in your name!" (HSF, 438).

Finally, there is one last *determination* in the name: the *determination of the economic in the last instance*. This does not discount from the aforementioned reading but is instead a testament to the breadth of the force of historical irony. The tradition of partisan names dates back to the times of anti-fascist struggle and they served to protect their bearers from prosecution in the circumstances of conspiratorial and illegal activities.[152] When conversing with Youmna El-Eid about Hassan Hamdan's pseudonym, she said that he had to use a pseudonym to be able to write and publish while working as a public-school teacher without facing the risk of termination of employment.[153] Youmna El-Eid is yet another partisan name that Hikmat al-Sabbagh took up facing similar circumstances.

B. No Innocent Reading

Amil posed a question in the introduction to his second book, in which he embarked on his non-innocent reading:

> [...] it is not permissible to let such an event pass without mention or reflection, but it is necessary to contemplate this artistic painting presented by contemporary thinkers about what they call Arab thought. But this necessary meditation process is arduous: How do we look at the painting? Do we describe it based on the multitude of its colors, and address each color individually, or do we summarize the ideas for the reader the ideas contained in each research or its comment? (AHA, 11)[154]

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[152] Dolar, *What's in a Name?*, 51.
[153] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[154] Amil had an interest in aesthetics. This relationship should be investigated at length elsewhere.

The book is particularly remarkable for his diatribes against almost all of the Kuwait conferences' presenters.[155] He concluded his introductory chapter by writing: "[it] is the idealist and empiricist logic that is driving the research of the two conferences, so it is not peculiar to find, in some of these works, the clearly widespread aroma of the Hegelian dialectic" (AHA, 23). Even long before this publication, Amil was typecast for perpetuating an Althusserian "aroma." Towards the end of my meeting with Evelyne, I decided to ask to expand this and my question to her was immediately met with an emotive increase in her voice:

> They used to label him an Althusserian, but he most definitely was not related to Althusser. He, of course used to read *a lot*. Amil bought all of Althusser's books. At that point, we were living in Algeria, and Amil kept going to France, he kept on buying books…So, he read everything, but he was not at *all* an Althusserian. And even though he read a lot, and was inspired, there is no single thinker that influenced him, or left an imprint that [large]…Even Mahdi used to say that he is a Marxist, but a 'Amilian Marxist.' Not a *Marxist*-Marxist (mish Marxī 'a Marx). You understand? He was not determined by Althusser…He read, analyzed, critiqued, and read again. Then he broadened his horizons, but he never…He was…himself, his own thinker![156]

When asking Youmna El-Eid about Amil and structuralism, given her engagement with him and this school (in spite of never taking on the name), she informed me:

> YE: He denied this. He rejected this [characterization], to say that there are traces of structuralism in his thought.
>
> ZK: Though he did use structuralists concepts, for example the "epistemological break," as introduced by Althusser into reading Marxist science of history. He developed concepts on the temporality of history, the temporality of structure. I wouldn't say he was a "Structuralist" like Balibar

[155] The book was written as response to the *Azmat al-Tatawwur al-Hadari fi al-Watann al-'Arabi* conference held in Kuwait on 7-11 April 1974. Amil mentions the following figures: Anouar Abdel-Malek, Mahmoud Amin El Alem, Constantin Zurayk, Suhayl Idris, Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, Shaker Mustafa, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Abdelkrim Ghallab, Fouad Zakariyya, Ammar Bouhouche. Parts of the conference's talks and discussions were reproduced in Al-Adab, v.22-05 (May 1974). A digitized copy of the issue is available on Al-Adab's digital archive: https://al-adab.com/volume/1974-v.22/05.

[156] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author, Emphasis was added by the author.

> or Althusser, as he critiqued their in Reading Capital. But there is a certain "residue" of structuralism, is there not?
>
> YE: Yes, possibly. This goes back to you. He denied it. And he critiqued it. And he said that he was not a structuralist. "I am not an Althusserian!" Now, how much we can…I don't know. It is not my specialty, what you are working on. But how much I can…I agree with you. I agree with your hypothesis, but you need to see how he used these concepts and how far we can take a concept from a theory, to use it in another if we are to return to Marx and class struggle and the extent to which he divorced it from structure.[157]

The underlying common denominator in all my interview meetings, perhaps the most repetitive, became exceedingly the question of *reading*. If the point of departure is to consider Amil's theoretical work as his most notable contribution to this modern Arab moment – rather than myopically stripping it down to the worn-out romantic figure of the warrior in boots – then the question of *reading* demands further investigation. Reading is central to any theoretical and historical inquiry, be it in the human or social sciences. To read is not only to subject theoretical and philosophical texts to an exegetical labor or to diagnose the backdrop against which the texts were introduced and read, but it must necessarily a contribution to the production of knowledge.[158] Reading in this sense conjoins philosophical concepts with their problematic. Reading Amil – that is reading his *reading* – in this light exposes the latent concept of *takhalluf* that overdetermined his entire theoretical production. Amil's commitment to examining the question of *takhalluf* entailed reading culture by precisely examining the absent causes behind phenomena. It entailed going beyond understanding *takhalluf* as an ontologically positive cultural category of a delay in intellectual progress (backwardness) or a naïve Marxist account of underdevelopment.

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[157] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[158] See Pierre Macherey, *The Object of Literature*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Reading, in this sense, cannot proceed without addressing an important *coupure* in the history of Marxism itself. Namely, the history of the humanist versus anti-humanist reading, which was polarized, particularly, by the debates between Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser. Symptomatic reading [lecture symtpomale] is neither a superficial reading nor a Hegelian reading. It proceeds by revealing the unconscious of a text and by constructing its *problematic* – Althusser defined this as the theoretical or ideological context of a framework which "is centered on the *absence* of problems and concepts within the problematic as much as their presence."[159] In the introduction to Amil's dissertation, under the subtitle: "[b]ut from which Marx do we depart?," Amil explicitly described his project as one of symptomatic reading:

> This route [discovering Marx through the historical process of "colonized-decolonized countries"] – and let us use the beloved Althusserian term – is a new "reading" of Marx in light of the historical process of the "third world." Deciphering it through the concepts of the writer of "Capital," is not an absent reading, nor is it even present in the recent interpretations of Marx, those of Sartre(1) and Althusser(2) for instance. If these returns to Marx have revealed a theoretical effectiveness in the first instance of that route, then the second instance has not yet started, or rather its beginnings were formed through Marx's ignorance, and for the distinct reality upon which we attempt to apply these concepts. (PeP,[160] 56-7)[161]

The central goal of this chapter is to set the scene of Amil's *reading* by explicating the development of Amil's "structuralism" as overdetermined by his paramount enmity

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[159] Althusser, *For Marx*, 253–54.
[160] Hassan Hamdan, "Praxis et Projet: Essai sur la constitution de l'Histoire / البراكسيس والمشروع: مبحث في تكوينة التاريخ," trans. Abdallah M. Ghattas, *Al-Ṭarīk: Fikriyya Siyāsiyya Faṣliyya* 78, no. 28–29 (2019): 47–58.
[161] Amil adds two footnotes specifying each of Sartre's and Althusser's interpretations. They are reproduced below:
(1): « rareté » (J.P. Sartre, Critique de la Raison Dialectique, Gallimard, Paris, 1960).
(2): « survivance » and « sous-développement » (L. Althusser, Pour Marx et Lire le Capital 2 tomes, Maspero, collection théorie, Paris, 1965).

towards idealism and lived experience, on the one hand, and his imperative to introduce a corrective to salvage Marxism from its various ideological instantiations on the other. The nexus of these aforementioned determining conditions is science. Amil's relationship to dialectical materialism and rational science has been undercut in the scholarship around his thought in favor of a reading that subjugates his thought to that of Nicos Poulantzas' and Louis Althusser's projects. Although science for Amil shares fundamental similarities to that of Althusser, Amil's conception of politics differs. In this chapter, I will take Amil's claims of "I am not a structuralist" seriously by reading it against itself, as well as against Althusser's own claim of "we were never really structuralists," in order to produce a reading that is different from the corollaries of Althusserianisms. The aim here is not to exonerate Amil from (his iteration of) structuralism or his reliance on the structural Marxism introduced by Althusser. The point is to say that Amil was, if I am permitted this exiguous play, 'guilty of an equally powerful and uncompromising passion.' A symptomatic reading of Amil's imbrication in idealism, phenomenology, rational materialism, science, Leninism, structural Marxism, and most importantly political practice, reveals the process of condensation which articulates the absent cause: *takhalluf*. In the process of this reading, I will attempt to gauge how widespread the Althusserian "aroma" is present in his work.

1. Science

> Above the *subject,* beyond the immediate *object,*
> modern science is founded on the *project.*[162]

[162] Gaston Bachelard, *Le nouvel esprit scientifique*, 10th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 14. Emphasis is Bachelard's. Translation is mine).

Amil's formative years in Beirut introduced him to philosophy. Evelyne Hamdan vehemently insists that his interests in Palestine, Nasserism, Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism had already been developing through his exposure to intellectual discussions held by his father at their household (the father was a supporter of Nasser at the time),[163] which was his secondary schooling, and as the unfolding protests in 1950s Beirut in support of Algeria (HSF, 158n13). At that point, Sartre's humanist Marxist existentialism was the dominant form of militancy in Lebanon, in both party struggle and literary activity.[164] Those years observed the rise of Nasserism in Beirut and its encounter with Marxism manifested in humanist-Marxist intellectual discussions. According to Evelyne Hamdan, there were also organized demonstrations in support of Algerian and Palestinian independence which Amil regularly attended (HSF, 149-158n11). Furthermore, Evelyne Hamdan claims that Amil's research in philosophy led him to Marxism, with a particular attention paid to existentialist Marxism as early as 1953 when he was of 17 years of age (HSF, 158n13). His secondary teacher at the Ali Bin Abi Talib Makasid school, Shafik Al-Hout, had an early influence on him and got him interested in the questions of Palestine, Nasserism, Marxism, and Existentialism (HSF, 158n13). Later on, Al-Hout became an active member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), but Amil did not maintain a relationship with him, nor did he mention him to his friends.[165] According to Evelyne, Al-Hout was not a communist, but a "fellow-traveler," who influenced the library of the young Amil.[166] In this period, Amil's book library included

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[163] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[164] See Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization*, 2018.
[165] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[166] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

Friedrich Engels's *Anti-Duhring* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1950) and *L'Origine de la Famille properiete privee et de l'Etat* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1954); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *L'Ideologie allemande* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1953); Karl Marx's *Misère de la philosophie* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1947); Vladimir Lenin's *L'Etat et la Revolution* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1946); among others (HSF, 159n14).[167] Amil transported this book library with him to France, then to Algeria, and then back to Beirut (HSF, 149-50).

There is no clear indication of the source of Amil's interests in science but Evelyne Hamdan traces them back to the intellectual salons that his father used to hold.[168] However, it was his years in Lyon that were responsible for his introduction to the philosophy and history of science of Gaston Bachelard, and of the scientific Marxism of Louis Althusser. Although the Althusserian moment had not yet arrived in Paris until the mid-1960s, at which point Amil was already in Algeria, Bachelard and Canguilhem's epistemology of science had already taken form. The influence of French historical epistemology is central to Amil's thought. He reads the role of scientific thought as part and parcel of a national liberation movement. Amil's transition from a humanist Marxism to a structuralist Marxism was instigated by Bachelard (the latter's work even influenced Sartre). Amil relies extensively on Bachelardian concepts such as epistemological rupture (*al-qafza al-fikriyya*), theoretical apparatus (bunya fikriyya), and scientific mind (*al-ʿaql*

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[167] Other books include Joseph Stalin's *Materialism dialectique et materialism historique* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1950) and *La materlialisme et la question nationale et coloniale* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1950); Henri Lefebvre's *Marx, 1818-1883. Introduction Et Choix* (Paris, Traits, Coll. Des 3 collines, 1947); Roger Garaudy's *La Theorie Materialiste de la connaissance* (PUF, 1954) and *La liberté* (Paris, Editions Sociales, 1955); and Tran-Duc-Tao's *Phenomenologie et materialisme dialectique* (Editions Minh-Tan, 1951) (HSF, 159n14).

[168] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

al-ʿilmī). The demarcation of science from ideology underpins all of Amil's corpus, spanning across his theoretical trilogy where science is posited in contradistinction to ideology, or in his re-reading of Ibn Khaldūn where he attributes to the latter's science of history an epistemological rupture with Islamic historiography, as well as in his articles on Arab philosophy and pedagogy in the Lebanese public school system and the Lebanese University. Amil's interest in the epistemology of Bachelard lies in his position that the confrontation between Marxism and modern epistemology was responsible for re-reading central Marxist concepts in a new light by revealing their scientificity and universality, and in this epistemology earns the title of a "distinct" field of class struggle (TKM, 20-1). In 1973, Amil wrote on the merits of Bachelard's concept of *epistemological rupture*, where science undergoes revolutionary leaps in the process of its development that Bachelard was able to derive by studying the history of the physical sciences. Amil continues by citing Althusser's rereading of Marx's Capital through the epistemological concept of rupture in order to "[illuminate] Marxism with a light that it discovers through it its valid renewal" (TKM, 20-1). The other example Amil cited was Althusser's "placing of Marxism in a conceptual confrontation with psychoanalysis" by rereading Freud – through Lacan's concept of overdetermination – to be able to "determine the theoretical status of the economic level that is in the social structure as the theoretical status of the unconscious in the human structure of the psyche" (TKM, 21).

Amil's time in France played an important role in nurturing and transforming his theoretical interests as well as radicalizing them politically. Amil maintained a close relationship with his principle advisor, Henri Maldiney, despite the latter being a

phenomenologist.[169] Evelyne notes that Amil did not select Maldiney to take on the role as his advisor; rather he was assigned to Amil.[170] Evelyne writes in her biography that Amil often used to spend nights at his thesis advisor's residence across town from their own place to debate the philosophy of nature and aesthetics. She recounts that

> the thing they used to talk most about was mystic aesthetics. He used to go at around 6pm to talk with Henri Maldiney about his dissertation, and he used to return at around 4am, not having talked about anything beyond aesthetics and so on. They wouldn't talk about the dissertation at all.[171]

A more direct influence on Amil's thought was François Dagognet, who was a member of Amil's thesis committee. Dagognet was a student of Canguilhem, who in turn, was not only the student of Bachelard, but the heir to the latter's historical epistemology project. Dagognet was influenced by the work of Gaston Bachelard and wrote several publications on Bachelard's rational materialism when Amil undertook his doctoral studies.[172] Furthermore, Evelyne notes that Amil first read Bachelard's *Nouvel esprite scientifique* in 1958.[173] It is worth noting that Bachelard's philosophy of science had instigated a return to the production of knowledge from a historical viewpoint. This method of "Historical Epistemology" reconstitutes *a posteriori* forms of knowledge in scientific disciplines to

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169 Although Amil's doctoral dissertation is titled Praxis et Projet, Amil clarifies in the introduction of his dissertation that his project is not concerned with reconciling Marxism and Existentialism, but is committed to treating a humanist concept such as "praxis" through a proper Marxian treatment. (PeP, 57-8). He later completely disavows this position for its Sartrean and humanist groundings in subject/object (NFK, 210).

170 Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

171 Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

172 Some of the works include Gaston Bachelard : sa vie, son œuvre, avec un exposé de sa philosophie. Paris : PUF, 1965. and Hommage d Gaston Bachelard (G. Bouligand, G. Cangnilhem, P. Costabel, F. Courtes, F. Dagognet, M. Damnas, G. G. Granger, J. Hyppolite, R. Martin, R. Poirier and R. Taton), PDF, Paris, 1957l

173 He also read phenomenology, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Chatelet, Dasanti, Lukács. He engaged particularly with Sartre's la Critique de la raison and Fanon, L'An V de la revolution algérienne, Masperro, coll. Cahiers libres, 1959 (HSF, 111). In addition to the journals : Humanite-Dimanche, Lettres francaises, La nouvelle critique, Temps modernes.

develop various *regional epistemologies*. The work of epistemological relativism carried out in Amil's method, however, does not imply a submission to historicist practices. Instead, scientific knowledge, just like economic development, is dependent on the law of uneven development, and therefore, grows out of the very soil of specific and distinct social structures without singularizing itself from the universal. Comparably to Althusser, Amil goes beyond reducing scientific practices to "superstructures," and grounds the transitive nature of scientific knowledge in determinations of historical social formations. Althusser describes his debt to Bachelard and Canguilhem as "incalculable."[174] However, Althusser's conception of scientific practice moves further from Bachelard and Canguilhem and aims to establish historical epistemology and the history of science as a regional field within historical materialism, the Marxian science of history.[175] Amil shares with Althusser the act of subsuming the history of science within historical materialism.

Amel's early writings maintain a minimal engagement with "praxis" and (its implementation in a) "project." Amil's own description of the Sartrean uses of the term "*project"* as "illegitimate" (PeP, 58) carries the last traces of a quasi-Sartrean influence on Amil's thought. In later works, he abandons these two notions. A project, as it is treated in Amil's dissertation, is to be read in a Bachelardian sense: the future and history are projects or programs of promised action.[176] Amil's project was to produce the necessary knowledge for revolutionary transformation, the tools of which involves the construction of a system of theoretical concepts through 'specifying' Marxian concepts from the

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[174] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 548.
[175] Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 180–81.
[176] Gaston Bachelard, *La dialectique de la durée* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001), 35.

viewpoint of colonized society (TKM, 20). However, in this project of creation lies an objective necessity of 'specifying' the concepts from their universality based on the laws of uneven colonial development. For Amil, the formation of scientific thought is inseparable from the universality of Marxism-Leninism, yet at the same time it ought to specify itself by thinking the colonial relation from the viewpoint of the colonized rather than from that of the imperialist (TKM, 19-20). Therefore, theoretical practice cannot proceed outside of the "soil" of the historical specificity determining thought in a social formation. Despite his heavy use of structuralist terminology – and the preface to his Prolegomena in which he claims that he does not explicitly analyze concrete history throughout the book –history plays a central role in the development of Amil's "structuralism." Evelyne recalls that Amil used the term "structure" as early as 1961, when he was in Algeria, perhaps as a result of his encounter with the work of Claude Levi-Strauss.[177] France also played an important role in the theoretical formation of Amil's militant practice. Elias Shaker dispelled the common belief among Lebanese militants that the Soviet-Union played largest role of "distilling" communist politics. He demonstrated this in a joke:

> The majority of Lebanese communist intellectuals were formed by French thought – by the French communist party, French thought, the French left, and not the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had an impact, but the intellectuals were not mimicking blindly. There was this joke they used to say in the 1950s: 'The Minister of Education Charles Malik declared that he wanted to forbid Lebanese students from specializing in France, because if they go to the Soviet Union, they return as anti-communists, but if they go to France, they return as Communists.[178]

[177] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[178] Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.

Historical analysis played a determining role in Amil's thought. Certain concrete events, and their universal implications, played a foundational role: the 1948 Nakba, the Nasserist moment of the 1950s-60s, the American invasion in 1958, the self-determination of the Bandung conference in 1955, the Algerian revolution, and later, the 1967 Arab defeat by Israel in 1967, the Lebanese Civil War and so on (HSF, 149). Evelyne chronicles the lasting impact of the 1950-1960s anticolonial struggles left on Amil (HSF, 147).[179] These world-wide events of liberation brought to the fore the problematic of colonialism for Amil, who read the capitalist colonial relation between imperialists and the colonized through structural causality, henceforth raising his stakes in problematizing the concept of *takhalluf* (as economic underdevelopment). Amil's theoretical stakes in questions of anti-imperialist struggle in previously colonized states, the role of laborers in revolutionary movements, and the conditions for revolutions in ex-colonies matured in Lyon by his reading of global struggles. Some of these readings include the work Georges Balandier on the third world; Charles Bettelheim on India; Pierre Bourdieu on Algeria; Hassan Riad, Anouar Abdel-Malek, Ibrahim Amer, and Mohamed Sobeih on militarization, Nasserism, and the agrarian question in Egypt respectively; and Gerard Chaliand on the Kurdish problem (HSF, 148-9).

2. "Takhalluf"

Two particular interrelated events – the former in Lyon and the second in Constantine – played a formative role in the development of his thought, and consequently, in his politics of reading. The first was the crisis of French intellectual thought and its

[179] For a list of events see footnotes of the section "Lyon: Mayakovsky" of the biography (HSF, 155-157n3-10).

influence on the *Parti communiste français* (PCF) and the *Union Nationale des Étudiants de France* (UNEF), particularly in relation to Algeria. The UNEF had to split due to the formation of two opposing camps maintaining opposing positions on the withdrawal of French troops and the ending of colonial presence in Algeria. Whereas the PCF held a clear position of opposition to the Algerian war and France's colonial presence, they did not agree on officially supporting the Algerian National Liberation Front until 1960, nor were they able to formulate a clear opposition to military drafting (HSF, 150). The party's ambivalence in transforming their position into action (of opposing the government's colonial policies) led to internal splitting and desertion (HSF, 160n20). Sartre was one of the most vocal critics of the PCF for their absence of action.[180] Amil illegally took part in political organizing in late 1950s and early 1960s in Lyon for Algeria independence. Amil, who was a visiting foreign student and was therefore under constant supervision by the state, was not permitted to take-part in political and organization work, but he still partook in the debates. Evelyne Hamdan says that after some time, he managed not only to attend meetings of various organizations and was able to host organizational meetings at his and Evelyne's home, but he and Evelyne also actively worked on an initiative to smuggle funds to Algeria for the resistance (HSF, 152-4). It is worth noting that students of Arab origin in France were banned from political activity and they were placed under surveillance. Any violation of this rule, particularly if done in solidarity with the FLN was deemed to be a collaboration with an enemy state and was penalized with a prison sentence (HSF, 161n29). Evelyne also recalled Amil attending lectures on labor that were organized by the PCF. It was perhaps there that he met Lucien Sève, who became an international member

[180] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Le Fantôme de Staline," *Les Temps Modernes* 129–131 (January 1957).

of the *Société des Amis de Hassan Hamdan / Mahdi Amil*, after Amil's assassination.[181] Evelyne writes that Amil identified with the Algerian people, and carried this relation with him for the rest of his life (HSF, 194, 199-200n6). Like their PCF friends who travelled to Algeria, Evelyne and Amil soon found themselves on their way to Algeria.[182] In 1963, the Algerian ambassador in Lyon offered Amil and Evelyne Hamdan teaching positions in Algeria (HSF, 154). Both Amil and his wife accepted the positions and soon Amil was on his way to Constantine to accept a government teaching position in philosophy (HSF, 161n31).

Amil arrived in Algeria on the first of November 1963, but the second formative event took place towards the end of his time in Algeria. Evelyne writes on the effect of the political practice spent in Lyon and how it informed the shaping of Amil's theoretical practice in relation to socialism. The colonial question for Amil began transforming from an issue of "counter-imperialism militancy in previously colonized countries" into problematic of the specificity of the colonial social formation vis-à-vis "the relation between capitalism and takhalluf (underdevelopment)" (HSF, 149). Although Amil read Régis Debray's works, he remained, according to Evelyne, critical of the latter's works on underdevelopment.[183] Evelyne details the literary and theoretical backdrop against which she and Amil developed their thought: Henri Alleg's *La Question* (1958); Jerôme Lindon's (editor) *La Gangrène* (1959) which was immediately banned and seized by De Gaulle's government for detailing accounts of torture; Gisèle Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir's

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[181] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[182] Amil taught philosophy in the following schools in Constantine: École Normale d'Instituteurs (1963-4), Lycée de jeunes filles El-Houriya (1964-5), Lycée Hihi El-Mekki (1965-6), and École Normale d'Instituteurs (1966-7) (HSF, 255n18).
[183] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

Djamila Boupacha (1960); André Mandouze's *La Révolution algerienne par les textes* (1961); and Frantz Fanon's *Charte du Tiers-Monde* (1961) among others (HSF, 153, 161n27-8). Amil's close allegiance to the Algerian cause was reinforced by his reading of Frantz Fanon (particularly *The Wretched of the Earth*), whose own politics on Algeria Amil regarded more favorably than he did the Algerian and the Lebanese communist parties.[184]

Evelyne views the Constantine period in Amil's life as "remov[ing] the veil that covers the other latent dimension in the philosopher." It set the stage for what would solidify and become clearer in Beirut: Amil's transformation into "the man of the universal" (HSF, 265). When describing Amil's thought and pedagogy in Algeria, Evelyne often invokes his fidelity to political causes – sometimes relating it to Sartrean commitment. She describes his pedagogical activity as "leading his students towards meaning" (HSF, 265).[185] Evelyne describes his first theoretical work as one in which the scientific precision of the French language encounters existentialist terminology while analyzing struggle in Algeria. These works in question are a series of lectures that Amil gave in Ben Badis university to senior students on Fanon and socialist political philosophy, which transformed into a two-part article he penned under the title, *La Pensée Révolutionnaire de Frantz Fanon* (The Revolutionary Thought of Frantz Fanon).[186] However, Amil's reading of Fanon was motivated by an imperative to cast another reading – a corrective – to counter, in his view, opportunist readings which had stripped Fanon of his revolutionary drive. Amil claims that the only way to understand Fanon is by reading

[184] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[185] I develop a different reading of Amil's acts in the epilogue.
[186] Hassan Hamdan, "La Pensée Révolutionnaire de Frantz Fanon," *Révolution Africaine*, no. 71–72 (1964).

his work as a "unity" in which Fanon's "anti-humanist humanism" was a "fusion" of "deep poetic expression" with the "rational that reveals the revolution in its historical process" (FF, 62). This should not be confused as a humanist statement. While Amil recognized the power of words in Fanon, his reading was done precisely to extricate the latter from the claws of Sartrean humanism. Elias Shaker concurred that Amil's article on Fanon was written to rescue Fanon from the Sartrean reading of "psychological problems […] a self-revolution against imperialism."[187] Amil was keen on depicting Fanon's "descriptiveness" as "quasi-Sartrean phenomenologist," but specified that it took its cue from another tradition, namely Fanon's Manicheanism (FF, 64). Echoing Fanon's Manichean view of the world (the colonial and the colonized worlds), Amil calls the colonial social structure a "structure brazen in its simplicity: in the colonial universe, two temporalities contradict one another in an absolute manner through a relation of pure exteriority […] the interiority of the colonial relation is made up of pure exteriority" (FF, 65).[188] This statement carries the seed of an extimate 'topography' that Amil would use to theorize the colonial relation a few years later. Amil will continue to rely on this Manichean conception of the colonial relation – and thereby fueling his anti-Hegelianism – by relegating any possibility of dialectic mediation between these false antagonisms to mere impossibility. The article proceeds by distinguishing the violence of the lumpen-proletariat of the underdeveloped world from other forms of violence and contrasting them from the national bourgeoisie,

[187] Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.

[188] A few years later, Amil revised this formulation by rejecting any claims of "interiority" or "exteriority:" "To speak of an "interior" concept and an "exterior" concept – even for demonstration, with quotation marks guarding them, either for ambiguity or for generalization – reveals an interiorizing logic that places the colonial social formation within an *external relation* with the imperial social formation, and it constructs between the two a *boundary* (ḥad fāṣil) – but we're not saying a *difference* (ikhtilāf) – that secludes them from one another" (NMS, 220).

and concludes by stressing the need for a national culture (thaqāfa wataniya) to negate the false dichotomy of a reified past and an enticing Europe (FF, 83-4).

By the mid-sixties, the historical moment in which the world saw an explosion of socialist and anti-colonial struggle was prematurely drawing to a close. It was not incidental that Amil's reading of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* stressed the following two points in breaking away from the historical process of *takhalluf*: first, the formative role of national culture, which was elaborated using existentialist terminology, requires a violent secession from the *takhalluf* imposed by the colonizers that paralyzed the historical processual movement of national culture. Second, it necessitates an "honest reconciliation with the self" by restoring the national culture and working through it (FF, 81). Evelyne relates Amil's concern with 'national culture' to the "harsh realization of the sheer violence of colonization." Amil discovered that the Algerian Arabic which was "poor, disfigured, kneaded with French words" (HSF, 304). Amil eventually came to take part in a national program of recuperating the Arabic language by reintroducing it into the Algerian curriculum. Amil's concern with language followed him to Lebanon, where he advocated for the reformation of the public education's Arabic curriculum, as well as its philosophical component. Amil and Hussein Mroue took up the second aspect, which entailed recuperating a 'tradition' through an anti-humanist reading to uncover a materialist undercurrent in Arab thought.[189] In 1974, Amil argues for a difference between tradition that is located within bourgeois ideology (such as the *Nahḍa*) and a materialist and revolutionary form tradition (counter-revolutionary ideological practice vs

[189] The rejection of humanism in reading culture will be explored in chapter 3.

revolutionary ideological practice). This projects later becomes a fundamental part of Amil's work on the *knowledge effect*.

The second take-away from Amil's reading of Fanon is the valorization of the role of the lumpen-proletariat in revolution. By the time that Amil penned the Fanon article in mid-1964, the socialist revolution in Algeria had taken a turn for the worse. Despite the revolutionary spirit, the newly formed FLN government led by ex-FLN militant Ahmad Ben Bella, slowly morphed into statism which saw an increase in bureaucracy, corruption, return of petit bourgeois power, government extortion, nepotism…etc. (HSF, 223-4). Evelyne mentioned to me that Amil found in Fanon the proper anti-statist critique: "he was with the people, not the administration."[190] Ben Bella's consolidation of power led to the forced resignation and persecution of various historical FLN leaders, as well as to internal conflict in socialist and communist groups and unions and their eventual dissolution (HSF, 228n23). In the midst of this counter-revolutionary pragmatism, Evelyne and Amil noted that Ben Bella's politics left out a large section of the population: the sellers, craftsmen, daily workers [مياوميون], and the unemployed. Amil's claims that the determinant opposition between the lumpen proletariat and the national bourgeoisie in Fanon's work were born out of a principal antagonism:

> It is the same constant depression, the same barren land, waiting for the cities to kidnap the little remaining men to in the end transform them into part of the unemployed, whereas the pleads calling for revolution fade away slowly, while the revolution gets shrouded by an imposed, bureaucratized socialism stripped to its bare form (HSF, 309).

In recollecting the exclusionary effect of the failed Algerian socialist revolution, Evelyne writes: "the revolutionary class, the farmers, were living under a new form of

[190] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

exploitation – exploitation not by the colonial bourgeoisie, but by the national bourgeoisie" (HSF, 223-4). On a global scale, the mid-1960s saw the relapse into violence of many socialist projects. Evelyne cites some of the disasters that influenced Amil's thought: the extermination of the Indonesian communist party, the American war on Vietnam, the Sino-Soviet split, and the Arab defeat by Israel during the Six-Day war in 1967, among other failures for the left in Chile, Cuba, Venezuela, Peru, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Angola, and Mali (HSF, 261-2). Despite Amil's unrelenting fidelity to the socialist revolution in "third world" movements around the world, this period proved challenging for socialist and communist movements. In 1965 Algeria, Ben Bella's minister of defense Houari Boumédiène – another ex-FLN militant – launched a successful bloodless military coup which replaced the failing post-revolution independence project with military rule. This further magnified the fear imposed by the military, the assassination of ex-revolutionary figures, the corruption and commercialization, as well as the growth of a reactive Islamic extremism. "The country is under anesthesia since the military coup," Evelyne writes, "and once again, Algeria closes in on itself through silence and fear" (HSF, 310).

It became evident for Amil that there lies in history a logic that eludes facile transformation – a structure that begets repetition. A "structure brazen in its simplicity" could no longer fit the description of the violent automaton which not only "subsumes the history of the colonized under a unity," but "makes it hostage to its own temporality of reproduction" (ITM, 50). It also became abundantly clear to Amil that acts of struggle could no longer be carried out in separation from a scientific revolution that could "give birth to [colonial society's] Marxist thought" (ITM, 51). This structural reproduction is precisely the logic of "takhalluf*" society effect* of the CMoP. Two decades later, in Amil's 1985 book on Ibn Khaldūn, he characterizes these laws that prevent ex-colonized countries

from developing, and instead, remain “incarcerated” in a circular and repetitive movement, by comparing the structural forces to a hex: “[…] the second the government reaches the peak of its development, it begins to fall apart as though it is hexed [كأنها محكومة بلعنة]”[191] (IFK,[192] 25).

3. Ideology

> *Epistemology is in its own right a distinguished field in the fields of class struggle, in the form of its shifts* as an ideological struggle (TKM, 21)

Althusser’s renewal of Marxist thought brought forward not just a new reading of Marxism, but a new philosophy – one that broke with the shackles of orthodoxy and gave birth to the redefined concept of ideology. The ‘differential philosophy’ that Bachelard and Canguilhem’s work gave birth to amounted to a new ‘discipline’ – *that of the philosophy of the concept.*[193] In his Marxian reading, Althusser’s concept of ideology supplants the lack of a concept to theorize the social nature of scientific practice.[194] A theory of ideology is, in other words, an explanatory account of the errors in the pre-history of a science, which are only brought to the surface after the rupture and transformation of a science. Although Bachelard rejected philosophies of knowledge and viewed scientific practice as a process of production, he lacked a concept of ideology. Instead, he opposes “scientific knowledge”

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[191] Amil will characterize the Colonial Mode of Production as one that is governed by certain temporalities of structure that at the slightest perceivable transformation taking place, a violent historical movement swoops in to restore it back to a state of “takhalluf.” This will be explained in chapter 2.

[192] Mahdī ʿĀmil, *Fī ʾIlmīyyat al-Fikr al-Khaldūnī* / في علمية الفكر الخلدوني, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1986).

[193] Dominique Lecourt, *Marxism and Epistemology: Bachelard, Canguilhem and Foucault*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1975), 73.

[194] Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*, 181.

to ordinary knowledge. Althusser, on the other hand, opposes a 'scientific' Marxist tradition to empiricism, historicism, and idealism. Scientific practice, in contradistinction to ideology, must exclude all ideological artifacts – whether moral, political, or religious – and be conducted in an ideological vacuum.[195] However, some historians noted that Althusser's concept of ideology, which outlines a symbolic system of social practice and its effects (particularly in his later writings, such as his work on interpellation), is functional – not epistemological.[196] This was Althusser's later 'break within the break,' which incidentally represents Amil's starting point. By contrast, Amil's conception of the ideological oscillates between the functional and the epistemological. Amil adopts a proto-topographical concept of an epistemological break from Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Althusser. Beginning from the *Theoretical Prolegomena*, ideology for Amil is part and parcel of the social relation that conditions the relationship of *fikr* (thought) to *wāqiʿ* (reality). Unlike the orthodox Marxian understanding of ideology (as an 'inverted image') whereby false consciousness needs to be overcome by the universal proletarian class, ideology, for Amil, is that which structures social reality. This reality is not structured through an intersubjective relationality, but rather, structurally in what he defines as a structure of thought (*bunya fikriya)*. In fact, in the first installment of his theoretical trilogy *Fī al-Tanāquḍ*, he begins with the relation of thought to reality – the premise that concrete, sensuous activity is the source of ideological representation – and transforms the notion of ideology from a distorted or illusory apprehension of reality to a form of ideological

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[195] Louis Althusser, *Matérialisme historique et matérialisme dialectique* (Paris: SER, 1966).

[196] Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*, 165. Althusser rejected the functionalist label in his "Note on the ISAs" text. See Louis Althusser, "Note on the ISAs," in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London ; New York: Verso, 2014), 218–31.

practice that reproduces the conditions of the capitalist-colonial social formation. By maintaining a careful distance between the scientific character of his analysis from the ideological objects of his critique, he then moves from an analysis of a *theoretical structure* (or 'ideology in general' for Althusser) to the conditions and historical material bases of the 'particular' ideologies of the dominant class. Amil's wager is twofold. First, he demonstrates that the 'particular' ideologies making up the *theoretical structures* of the dominant class, such as religion, sectarianism, tribalism, nativism, etc., constitute a distinguished form of (colonial) bourgeois political practice – that is ideological practice (al-mumārasa al-ʿaydiyūlūjiyya). Second, the revolutionary working class needs to start from scientific practice as part of class struggle (not just 'concretely' but also on the level of knowledge). Only when the working class are equipped with the proper theoretical tools can they fend off the *dominant ideology* with a revolutionary party's *ideological practice* which seeks to crystalize the political and economic conditions of society.

The transformation of the notion of "practice of ideology" to "ideological practice" is credited to Althusser, yet Amil's later theorizations reach different conclusions. Althusser's rational materialism is most indebted to the Dutch rationalist philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). Althusser's hostility towards positivist sciences is a product of his Spinozist reading of Kant and science. The Althusserian hostility towards the empirical, which stems from Spinoza's "orders of knowledge," informs the Althusserian distinction between the realm of ideology and the realm of science, as well as the process of systematization of knowledge. For Spinoza, received notions of lived experience occupy the first level. The ascension to the second level of knowledge, where things are grasped by their concepts, necessitates a "break" from the ordinary to the scientific. Amil's project of creating a system of concepts tries to attain the third level where things could be grasped

singularly without analogy.[197] A Marxian science, in Althusser's account, in contradistinction to a "spontaneous" or ideological one, deduces the characteristics of a social formation from the "theoretical object" that is its mode of production. This is the source of confusion among Amil's readers – they did not understand why Amil sought to conceptualize the CMoP on these terms, without any recourse to historical or empirical observation. Similarly, Althusser's conception of structural causality is built on Spinoza's conception of God, where God's finite attributes disappear into the effects.[198] Althusser puts this conception of structural causality into action in the place of the idealist "expressive causality" or the historicist "mechanistic causality" to elaborate a theory of history that is tasked with periodizing the history of human societies in terms of modes of production. It is this Marx, the late, "non-Hegelian," Marx of the concept of the "mode of production" that Althusser and Balibar consider to have undergone an "epistemological break" with the tradition of the philosophy of history.[199] Amil's doctoral dissertation "Praxis et Projet. Essai sur la constitution de l'histoire" was on this very topic. In a similar vein to the Althusser's reading of dialectical materialism as Marx's philosophy of history and of Marx's historical materialism as his science of history, Amil divides the first part of his dissertation "Rupture Épistémologique" into a subsection on Marx's philosophy and another on Marx's theory of history.[200] It must be noted, however, that Bachelard's critique of phenomenology views everyday experience as affectively impregnated and accursed by unconscious libidinal energies. The mind suffers from a spontaneous tendency towards the

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197 Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 2014, 146–47.
198 Peter Dews, "Althusser, Structuralism, and the French Epistemological Tradition," in *Althusser: A Critical Reader* (Oxford; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1994), 115–16.
199 Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 210.
200 Table of contents from Praxis et Projet, p.426-7. Courtesy of Evelyne Hamdan.

exaggeration and facile generalization of intimate or individual particularities, which would ultimately hinder the development of scientific knowledge.[201] Therefore, for scientific knowledge to be generated, an "epistemological rupture" needs to be introduced to break with the spontaneous assumptions of the particularities and givens of the everyday. And in keeping with Althusser's reading of Marx's "theoretical revolution" as a dual-faceted critique of the myth of *homo-economicus* and the myth of *homo-psychologicus*, Amil extends his ideology critique of historicism and economism to include empiricism and psychologism.

Amil started the introduction of his article *al-Istiʿmār wal-Takhalluf* – his first article published in al-Ṭarīq (June 1968) – with the claim that the starting-point of analysis requires a healthy, scientific mind with the right theoretical tools: "the *scientific mind* cautions the use of spontaneity and rejects it unless it was demonstrated and became true […] Only a *lazy mind*, afraid of pursuing the *path of truth*, is limits itself to spontaneous appearance" [202] (ITM, 50-1). Amil's aim was not in rearticulating the relation between colonialism and *takhalluf*, but in determining the causal relation connecting colonialism with *takhalluf*: structural causality. The only way to deduce this relationship is through developing the theoretical tools capable of producing scientific concepts. Despite the sharp contrarian tone of his text *al-Istiʿmār wal-Takhalluf*, published in al-Ṭarīq (June 1969), which warranted an editorial disclaimer (the *Ṭarbūsh*), limited his call to science for the sake of scientific production and had not mentioned science's relationship to ideology. When I brought up with Youmna El-Eid and Elias Shaker the absence of his determinate

[201] Dews, "Althusser, Structuralism, and the French Epistemological Tradition," 117.
[202] Emphasis is mine. Amil writes the word concept in French emphasize the labor of the concept. Also, this is one of the rare places where Amil writes the word truth.

contradiction (نقض) of thought as opposed to merely critiquing (نقد) them – a key characteristic in Amil's writings – in this article, I was met with laughs. In fact, the entire article is missing the language of negation of bourgeois thought and ideology. Youmna El-Eid recalls that Amil "held back" his critique in the beginning of his theoretical practice.[203] Elias Shaker considered the transition between critique and determinate negation to be part of Amil's effort of "working on his appropriation of language" as he was trying to translate concepts that were new to the Arabic language. However, from the second part of his article, Amil began almost all of his writings not just with a plea to science and revolutionary theory, but with an epistemological distinction between scientific practice and bourgeois ideology, wherein the former serves as the fundamental determinate opposition of the latter. As such, he critiques, in the second installment, empiricism (tajrībiyya) and idealism (mithāliyya) as the basis of an "illusory" theory of causality, which negates the logic of contradiction (ITN,[204] 111). He argues that only scientific materialist theory could fend off the ideological politics of phenomenology and everyday experience. Amil's hostility towards phenomenology, as best exemplified by his comments on *takhalluf*, vilifies positivist or empirical (jawharī) engagements with the question of underdevelopment or its sensuous effects. As such, in response to economists and UN development specialists – who based the lack of a "middle class" in ex-colonized countries on the phenomenon of *takhalluf* – Amil claims that their studies produce confusion because the term *takhalluf* is itself a result of a confusion. He goes on by emptying the term of any scientific character in order to reveal that it is not a scientific term, but an

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[203] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

[204] Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Al-Istiʿmār wa-l-Takhalluf: Niẓām al-Intāj al-Kūlūniyālī / الاستعمار والتخلف: نظام الانتاج الكولونيالي," *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 28, no. 5 (1969): 86–126.

ideological one (ITN, 91). Amil also refers to the notion of *takhalluf* as a bad “generality” and locates the starting point of scientific engagement through studying it as *society effect*, without citing Althusser (ITN, 98). He also invokes Charles Bettelheim’s formulation of theories of *takhalluf* as the “misleading effort of bourgeois ideology” (ITN, 98).

An earlier instance of Amil’s invocation of *ideological practice* could be seen in a 1970 book review in al-Ṭarīq, entitled “On the Book: ‘The True Left and the Opportunist Left’” (Ḥawla Kitāb “al-Yasār al-Haqīqī wal-Yasār al-Mughāmir”).[205] In this article he critiques the “petit bourgeois ‘leftist theoreticians’” who endorse or use the term “progressive regimes” (al-anẓima al-taqadumiyya) (HKY, 69). He claims that the term does not specify the nature of the social formation of the countries it purports to describe. Since the term was not arrived through an analysis of social formations, it fails to contribute any form of scientific knowledge to thought. The specific political signification carried (bourgeois ideology) in the term prompted Amil to distinguish between theoretical discourse (discours théorique, “al-lugha” al-naẓariyya) and political discourse (discours politique, al-lugha al-siyāsiyya), in order to relegate the term *progressive regimes* to the latter (HKY, 69). Despite commending the author of the book for his serious engagement, Amil claims that the it was only limited to ideological practice (mumārasa ʿaydiyūlūjiyya) as opposed to theoretical practice (mumārasa naẓariyya) because the author was forced to respond to questions limited to political discourse (HKY, 64). Amil clarifies in a footnote that political discourse necessarily has an ideological aspect, but that it does not elaborate the *epistemological* character of ideology in relation to political practice (HKY, 64n1). In

[205] This book was a critique of leftist practices. It was published anonymously under a pseudonym of Yasari Lubnani. See Yasārī Lubnānī, *Al-Yasār al-Ḥaqīqī wa-l-Yasār al-Mughāmir: Iʿādat al-Iʿtibār ilā al-Ḥaqīqa Fī al-Khilāf maʿa Jamāʿat “al-Ḥurriya” / اليسار الحقيقي واليسار المغامر: اعادة الاعتبار الى الحقيقة في الخلاف مع جماعة “الحريه”* (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1970).

other words, it has a fundamental role in class struggle as a “distinguished” field (haql, the Althusserian equivalent of ‘regional level’) of political practice In the conclusion of a 1973 article in al-Ṭarīq (and final chapter of *Fī al-Tanāquḍ*) on Lenin, he formalizes his ‘theory’ of ideological practice. The theoretical ‘field,’ he argues, is the ideological field of class struggle because of the dominant class’ ideological practice that seeks to identify (and subsume) theory under ideology (TKM, 24). Amil elaborates that his notion of the ideological contradiction is a contradiction between a dominant ideology and a proletarian ideology (al-ʿaydiyūlūjiyya al-prulitariyya). The former seeks to obfuscate (materialist) scientific theory and disavow revolutionary *coupures* in thought through its ideological practice, while the latter negates this idealist sublation of difference and therefore introduces *epistemological ruptures* through its *proletarian ideological practice* (al-mumārasa al-ʿaydiyūlūjiyya al-prulitariyya) (TKM, 25). In other words, theory is ideological, but it could be used by the proletariat to contradict dominant ideology through science. Amil’s theorization of the role of science in a proletarian ideology, which is antagonistic to the dominant ideology does not blur the demarcation line between science and ideology as much as it transforms the ‘break’ into a topography. Althusser’s break with the epistemological break is theorized along similar lines.[206] However, Amil’s formulation of the antagonistic role of theory is noteworthy. He theorizes the contours for using science to transform a mechanism that is responsible for the reproduction of capitalism’s relations of production against itself. In other words, against dominant ideology in order to obstruct the reproduction of state apparatuses. The formula is then transformed to the ideological negation of science (ideological practice by dominant

[206] Balibar, “Althusser’s Object.”

ideology) vs the scientific negation of ideology through ideology (ideological practice by proletarian ideology). Amil justifies this contradiction by framing it as a "necessary" contradiction of capitalism – it is the scientific practice of the negation of ideology from within the ideological field of class struggle:

> There is no doubt that there is a contradiction between the two statements:
> 1-The theoretical field is itself the ideological field of class struggle.
> 2-The theoretical field is the determinant opposition of the ideological field of class struggle.
> However, this contradiction, itself, is the established class contradiction between proletarian ideological practice and bourgeois ideological practice. It is what determines the [proletarian's] class practice as theoretical, and therefore scientific, practice and determines the [bourgeois] class practice as ideological, and therefore un-scientific, practice (TKM, 25).

Before proceeding to the following section on Amil's "epistemology," I will conclude this section with the last few lines from the aforementioned article. In addition to demonstrating Amil's direct invocation of epistemology, it brilliantly demonstrates Amil's humorous, militant, and polemical writing merely two years from the start of the civil war in Lebanon:

> This source of the difference in the differentially specified forms of the universality of Marxist-Leninist thought could be seen in the [historical] distinction between imperial, colonial, or socialist social formations. If we observe the actualization of this [specificity] in the colonial social formation, we realize that the ideological field of this formation's class struggle differs from that of the imperial social formation. […] And the colonial bourgeoisie is, as we already know, in a relation of class servitude to the imperial bourgeoisie, which prevent it from developing its forces of production in the same form as its imperial bourgeois mistress (feminized master: sayyidatuhā). The causes which are specific to the CMoP abound; we see the colonial bourgeoisie practice its class struggle in an ideological field that is oblivious to the field of "epistemology" for example, or a field called "philosophy of science." It [colonial bourgeoisie] has not reached in its ideological practice that luxuriant (المرفه) "epistemological" method which the imperial bourgeoisie have reached. It is the "misfortune" of our Marxism-Leninism to see itself coerced through the logic of class struggle, to counter ideological trends which drown in primitiveness and ignorance. The colonial bourgeoisie in our society is

> distinguished by these [qualities], such as the sectarian, tribalistic, or religious trends, or other ideological trends which characterized pre-capitalist society. The colonial bourgeoisie remains an abomination (مسخاً) in all its activity, and through its ideological activity, its thought often returns to the middle ages. It [colonial bourgeoisie thought] revives [these trends] in a process of class reminiscence, where it yearns for what it once was, dreading a fate in which it sees the face of death being drawn on the horizon of its processual class movement (TKM, 26, emphasis is Amil's).[207]

4. Epistemology

In my meeting with Youmna El-Eid, I brought up a note she had written in the al-Ṭarīq issue dedicated to Hussein Mroue and Mahdi Amil shortly after their assassination in 1987. El-Eid wrote a few ambiguous lines, in an attempt to list Amil's various published projects, and she hinted to an unmaterialized project in which Amil had planned to develop his own *theory of knowledge*.[208] El-Eid let me in on a little secret: Amil had been intending on producing a major epistemological study of the relationship between theoretical practice and political practice. Unfortunately, she told me that the project was cut short due to the intensification of the war, which forced Amil to write more concrete sociopolitical and historical works. The one thing she remembered about his aborted project was a diagram he had drawn to let her in on his thought process over a morning coffee in one of the cafés on the *Raouche corniche* in Beirut. This diagram, which was eventually misplaced and lost, was made up of symbols illustrating "levels of knowledge." El-Eid described it as a diagram on:

> The levels of knowledge, or from A to B. He wrote them in this way, how knowledge moves from point A to point B. [...] He had an obsession (هاجس, hajis) working on this system of knowledge and its historicity. Maybe this can explain his use of certain terminologies. Maybe, *epistemological development of knowledge* (tattawur al-maʿrifī ka maʿrifa). As in, why should we reject that

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[207] All emphasis in Amil's excerpts and quotes are his own unless otherwise noted.
[208] Youmna El-Eid, "مؤلفات مهدي عامل," *Al-Ṭarīk: Revue Culturelle* 46, no. 3 (June 1987): 48.

> the historical movement and development of knowledge, could use a concept to not say idea, there are concepts, or an element (ʿunsur) if you extricate it from structuralism and you work on it gradually to reach a relation based on class.[209]

Indeed, Amil's epistemological work show several *coupures* of their own. Before attempting to construct this conceptual *object of* knowledge, that is Amil's differential *object of knowledge,* a distinction here needs to be made between Amil and Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Althusser. For Bachelard, an epistemological break is the moment when the chaotic coalesces into a coherent system, where the negation of errors plays a constitutive role in the formation of a rupture. Bachelard's insistence on the autonomy of scientific practice meant that the philosophy of science must be divorced from the philosophy of philosophers. Due to the latter's constitution of non-scientific (idealist or empirical) notions, which risk restricting "epistemological obstacles" to theoretical structures, a philosophy of negation is required to break such obstacles.[210] The proximity of Amil's formulation to that of Bachelard is uncanny. Amil's systematic use of this epistemology in his theoretical system is maintained in his translation of *theoretical structures* (بنية فكرية, what is Althusser's "apparatus of thought"), *epistemological obstacle* (عائق المعرفة), and *relations of production of concepts* (علاقة الإنتاج المعرفي) into Arabic. Canguilhem's epistemological history of science focuses on the scientific practice of scientists within their historically specific social formations – therefore knowledge production is discontinuous but tied to the contingencies and necessities of a particular historical reality.[211] This formulation of scientific practice as a "struggle of tendencies" is

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[209] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[210] Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*, 179.
[211] Resch, 180. Robert Paul Resch, Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory, p.180

best exemplified by Amil's book *On the Scientificity of [Ibn] Khaldūn's Thought*.[212] Although Althusser had referred to his debt to Bachelard and Canguilhem as "incalculable,"[213] his account of "epistemological break" undergoes multiple transformations throughout his life. Althusser's own "break" from the break comes after multiple reworking of philosophy and politics and their 'objects.'[214] While Althusser's early system introduces contradiction and the concept of ideology, in relation to science, the "mature" form is closer to topographic "struggle of tendencies," and thereby doubles the efficacy of science and ideology. As such, a scientific *coupure* in Marxism severs its ties from the ideological forms of historicism, empiricism, and idealism. By drawing a demarcation line between science and ideology – with theoretical practice acting as passageway from ideology to science, even if through the instrument of ideological practice – Marxist historical materialism becomes the most advanced form of scientific practice. Amil's account of "epistemological break" is an amalgamation of all three accounts. From Bachelard's historical epistemology, he took the concept and the philosophy of science; from Canguilhem's epistemological history of science, he took the historiographic methodology and scientific practice as struggle, and from Althusser, he took ideology, contradiction, structure, and as I will attempt to demonstrate, a "rudimentary" *topography*.

Amil simultaneously established three versions of an epistemological *obstacle* and *coupure* in knowledge which persisted throughout his work. Those three instances were neither introduced consequentially, nor distinguished as separate formulations, but were

[212] Chapter 3 will be focused on Amil's reading of Ibn Khaldūn.
[213] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 548.
[214] For more on this, please refer to Etienne Balibar's piece, Althusser's Object.

operating at the same time with minor transformations. The first two instances of a *coupure* appeared in his earliest writings (in his dissertation, *Praxis et projet* in 1967 and in his two-part essay, *al-Istiʿmār wal-Takhalluf* in 1968-9), whereas the third made its first appearance in a chapter on Marxism-Leninism that was first published in 1973. The last text, which was later included as the final chapter of the *OC* (it was written after CMP and FTT, but inserted as the final chapter of the OC), was published around the same time of the publication of Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus* in France. The first instance of *coupure* (science, from pre-science) is the transformation of science from its pre-scientific form, thereby revealing ideological artifacts. Building on this, he disavowed "historicism" from an "Arab" Marxian canon and forbade a relapse into it. As such, any empirical or historicist theorization of *takhalluf* or a CMoP that does not take into account the scientific revolutions in historical materialism would be ideological. Echoing Althusser, Amil argued for an understanding of causality on these grounds in order to not "smudge or dissolve history" by assuming it to be teleologically continuous (BAH,[215] 45-6). Amil defined the process of thought not as a relation of "continuity and identification, where the elements follow from each other," but as a relation of a "structural differential that severs the former element from the latter" (BAH, 45-6). Amil formulated this argument to claim that Marxism-Leninism is not continuous with preceding thought but constitutes a rupture, which in turn, creates a new *theoretical structure* (BAH, 56).[216] However, if this instance of *coupure* attests to the universal character of scientific

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[215] Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Baʿḍ al-Afkār Ḥawla Kitāb 'Tarīkh al-Ḥaraka al-Ishtirākiyya fī Misr' / بعض الافكار حول كتاب 'تاريخ الحركة الاشتراكية في مصر,'" *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīya Siyāsīya* 31, no. 10 (October 1972): 36–56.

[216] Amil mentions Ibn Khaldun as an example of this rupture within science of history in the Arab world. Amil wrote this in 1972, 13 years before expanding on Ibn Khaldūn's scientific revolution in 1985.

knowledge, the second instance confirms that thought develops unevenly in colonized society due to the "epistemological obstacles" imposed by an impeded history (tārīkh muʿāq).

The second instance of *coupure* (theoretical structure distinguished from the universal) was Amil's incursion of Marxism-Leninism into the field of epistemology. Amil clarified his position during the war:

> Here lies the entire problematic of specifying the universality of concepts; it lies in their addressing of the reality of this [social formation] difference. The process of specification is not a process of application, not by force nor consent, nor is it a process of translation […] there is no existence of two theoretical fields, but there is a universal theoretical field whose concepts are distinguished through production of knowledge according to the specificity of the social formation (NMS, 220).

Although elements from this argument appeared in previous writings, Amil dedicated an article to deal with this question titled "*Specificity and Universality in Marxism-Leninism*" (at-Tamayyuz wa-l-Kawniyya fī-l-Mārksīyya al-Linīniyya) which was published as a chapter in his Theoretical Prolegomena. What had initially begun a few years prior as an argument grounded inn "perspectivism"[217] (i.e. Marx and Lenin's understanding of the colonial encounter from "capitalism's viewpoint" as opposed to a "colonialism's viewpoint") (ITM, 55, 55n8, 57),[218] quickly transformed into an axiomatic argument based on Lenin's 'law of uneven development.' Against the backlash of claims of a "deviation from the party-line," Amil's invocation of Lenin came to reaffirm the Leninist character of his CMoP hypothesis. He did not only invoke Lenin's conception of "uneven development" to argue for a differential MoP in colonial society based on structural

[217] The earlier instance is closer to the Lukáscian position. See Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2010), 215–21.
[218] In his later works, Amil uses "viewpoints" strictly when referring to classes.

causality, but more importantly, to argue that scientific knowledge in “underdeveloped” / “backwards” (“*mutakhallifa*”) society was also subject to the law of uneven development: it developed unevenly in relation to scientific knowledge in imperial capitalist society. Amil’s wager was to read Marx against himself to derive an “absent” theory of the colonial relation in Marx’s science, while at the same time maintaining the universality of Marxist historical materialism in order to discredit nativist and culturalist returns to Arab or Islamic anti-Marxist claims of Arab or Islamic “authenticity” and “particularity.” Following Canguilhem’s rubric, Amil argued that the “successive technical and scientific revolutions in western capitalist societies from the 17th century” were the “historical fertile soil” that led to the development of “different philosophical trends, from empiricism to positivism, going through Kantian [rationalism] and reaching structuralism” (TKM, 30). Consequently, Amil claims that the production of thought in colonial society cannot happen in the “field of modern epistemology […] such as the scientific practice of different natural sciences or mathematics,” due to a “practical impossibility and not an impossibility in principle” (TKM, 32). For Amil, the production of Marxist-Leninist thought in colonial society must “find its conditions in the movement of class struggle in our society […] therefore it must, by necessity, be the production of the theory of the colonial relation itself” (TKM, 33). However, it must be noted that despite distinguishing from capitalist society the historical conditions of the possibility of knowledge in colonial society, Amil remained a staunch critic of theories of an “Arab mind” or an “Arab Marxism” – this is well depicted in his critique of the papers presented in the Kuwait conference on “Arab Civilization” (1974) and his critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism thesis (1985).

The third instance of *coupure* in Amil's work (epistemological demarcation between dominant ideology and the revolutionary party's ideology) is a synthesis of the previous two instances, and it marks Amil's fundamental disagreement with Althusser's structuralism – a disagreement based on a productive misreading of Althussser.[219] If Amil's first instance of epistemological obstacles concerns the presence of non-scientific (or ideological) thought within the universality of knowledge, and the second instance characterizes these obstacles as historical determinations subject to scientific struggle within their social formations, then the third instance does not only locate the obstacles within class struggle, but considers them to be precisely the epistemological *demarcations* between bourgeois practice and the practice of an organized working class party (the Marxist-Leninist party). Epistemological *obstacles* in this sense are transformed from obstacles in a *struggle of tendencies* (materialist science contra idealist ideology) to necessary ideological mechanisms (ʾadawāt) utilized as part of the dominant class's ideological practice (*determinate theoretical ideology*). By locating thought within a "relationship of contradiction in an ideological struggle, which is one appearance of class struggle" (OC, 55) then each theoretical structure, which reflects a "specific class ideology, does not only differ, but contradicts the antagonistic class ideology" (OC, 56). Differently put, the *struggle of tendencies* becomes the *struggle of ideological tendencies* between the *ideological practice of the state apparatus* and the *ideological practice of the*

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[219] Amil, like many of Althusser's detractors, castigated Althusser for possibly subsuming the revolutionary party under the concept of ISA. Althusser wrote a corrective article titled "Note on the ISAs" (French title: Note sur le AIE) in 1977, but was published in French after Amil's assassination. Althusser writes: "If all parties are ISAs and serve the dominant ideology, a revolutionary party, reduced to this 'function', becomes unthinkable. But I have never written that a *political* party is an Ideological State Apparatus […] I am afraid that readers have not clearly understood what I was proposing to think under the term political Ideological State Apparatus." Althusser, "Note on the ISAs," 221. Emphasis is Althusser's.

revolutionary party. Amil proceeds to critique Althusser and Charles Bettelheim for failing to take into consideration “class difference, and therefore the demarcating epistemological boundary, between the working class’s party and the rest of other parties” (OC, 77n1) based on the Amil’s misreading of Althusser. Amil then blames the “structuralist tendency” for obscuring the “relationship of difference between the two antagonistic [classes] in the Marxian contradiction” (OC, 77n1). Another instance of this *topography* of difference could be seen between the theoretical structure of the colonial bourgeoisie and that of the imperial bourgeoisie, (as I have already concluded in the previous section on ideology).

Amil’s epistemology fulfills three demarcations in through that valorize *structural difference* (ikhtilāf bunyawī) over similitude or identification (tamāthul): 1- A (diachronic) historical demarcation, which inscribes *constituted* differences in the discontinuous processual movement of history (pre-capitalist, capitalist, socialist), 2- A (coeval) social formation demarcation, which inscribes *constituted* differences between different contemporaneous MoP instantiations (colonial MoP, imperial MoP), 3- A (synchronic) class-based demarcation, which inscribes a *constitutive* difference in thought within the same social formation along class lines (bourgeois, proletarian). Put differently in terms of “practice,” Amil was arguing that a revolutionary workers party (the Lebanese Communist Party) was the point of rupture, and therefore marked a constituted *difference*, between itself and: 1- pre-socialist thought (inclusive of all various “ideological struggles” in forms of religion, sectarianism, ethnicism, tribalism, nativism), 2- socialist thought in non-colonial social formations (i.e. in the socialist organizations and movements of France, England, Italy), and 3- other political parties and “leftist” opportunists within the same social formation. This is what led Amil to claim, in 1973, that the LCP is “the only party

capable" of theoretical practice (TKM, 24). He then specified, "*not in the field of other sciences, nor in the field of modern epistemology* […] but it *necessarily* must be the production of a *theory of the colonial relation*" (TKM, 22). There are two ways to theorize Amil's last point demarcating dominant ideology from proletarian ideology. The first (more or less conservative) reading would read Amil's epistemology as a literal transformation of the *epistemological break* to a *class break*. However, nowhere in his writings can one find any formulation of a "bourgeois science vs proletarian science" that was once heralded by a Stalinist revisionism known as Lysenkoism.[220] Furthermore, his plea for a theoretical practice (championed by revolutionary proletariat) as a *tracing of a line of demarcation* (between antagonistic classes or "camps") cannot simply be characterized similar to a "politician" opposing "proletarian theory" and "bourgeois theory."[221] In fact, he mocked these two exact formulations in his last published work that dealt with epistemology (1985) (MES, 63). Rather, I would argue that his proximity to Althusser's thought – specifically his formulation of a differential *apparatus of thought* (bunya fikriyya) – indirectly led Amil's towards his differential formulation. In light of the colonial encounter, and the necessity of formulating a form of (both scientific and ideological practice) practice against colonial and imperial bourgeoisie, Amil's work on epistemology developed early traces of the "topographic" framework characterizing Althusser's "break" with the concept of *epistemological break* in his later years.

If the emphasis on the *break* in Amil's doctoral dissertation *Praxis et Projet* paralleled Althusser's initial epistemological *object* in Pour Marx (1965) and Lire Le

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[220] Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science?: The Case of Lysenko*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1977).
[221] Balibar, "Althusser's Object," 171.

Capital (1965), then this latter transformation in the *Theoretical Prolegomena* is without a doubt indebted to Althusser's *Lénine et la Philosophie* (Paris, Maspero,1969) as well as *Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État* (La Pensée no.151, 1970) (HSF, 668n60). Despite having never used the term topography explicitly, Amil's *Theoretical Prolegomena* used the *coupure* as a metaphor, more than as a concept. His second book *Azmat al-Ḥaḍāra al-ʿArabīyya am Azmat al-Burjuwāzīyāt al-ʾArabīyya* (1974) demonstrates the transformation of his object of theory into the *double position of theory* where theory is "itself part of the conjuncture in which it intervenes."[222] In this remarkable book, which he penned as an ideology critique of the Kuwait conference proceedings, Amil attacked most of its participants. He opens up with the following line: "Let us tell the reader right now, before proceeding with this research, that our viewpoint is Marxist-Leninist, which was not present in the market of ideas, despite the enormity of the size of its representatives" (AHA, 6). In this book, Amil critiqued appropriations of the Cartesian dualism of self/other, he explicitly tied contemporaneous Arab thought to Hegelian "objective" idealism, and he critiqued, in line with Althusser and Alain Badiou, the applications of "models.". He also echoed Althusser's theorization of the *knowledge effect*, which was itself based on what Marx called the "*mode* of appropriation of the world peculiar to knowledge."[223] Amil dismissed the object of the conference by asserting that tradition (*turāth*) "should not be the *knowledge object.* The task is not one of reviving tradition or abolishing it, this statement is meaningless. The task is one of appropriating it through knowledge" (AHA, 202). Five years later, his third book *al-Naẓarīyya fī al-*

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[222] Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliott (London; New York: Verso, 1990), 104.
[223] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 62.

Mumārasa al-Siyāsīyya: Baḥth fī Asbāb al-Ḥarb al-Ahlīyya fī Lubnān (1979) was, according to Youmna El-Eid, initially planned to be a "study that builds on his intellectual project of producing scientific knowledge in the social and historical reality." However, due to the war, she claimed "he had to leave it and move on to the study of a historical reality witnessing its historical procession through its transformation by a civil war in Lebanon."[224] Amil says as much in the preface of the book – an introduction that bears the initial, abandoned title of the book *al-Mumārasa al-Naẓariyya wal-Mumārasa al-Siyāsīyya*, and which was published in al-Ṭarīq in 1975. The book takes on a markedly historical and sociological character, but the introduction is more theoretical (if not one of his most speculative texts) and represents a curious engagement with the *process of history*, the *object* (and *subject*) of *knowledge*. In it, he reproduces Althusser's critique of the Hegelian dialectic as nontopographical – the "exterior" and "interior" abolish the *real distinctions* of reality, practices, and historical forces[225] – and articulates an indirect formulation of a topography: "there is no "internal" or "external" relation between the colonial and imperial. Consequently, there is no *barrier* – that is not to say *difference* – between the two" (NMS, 220).

There is not enough space to analyze the final two epistemological studies in depth, but it is my strong suspicion that they laid the groundwork for Amil's unrealized "theory of knowledge."[226] The last two books have a predominantly epistemological character and were published at the same time in 1985, two years before Amil's assassination. In the third chapter of this thesis, I argue that the two books, "*Fī ʾIlmiyyat al-Fikr al-Khaldūnī*"

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224 El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
225 Balibar, "Althusser's Object," 175.
226 El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

and "*Hal al-Qalb lil-Sharq wa-l-ʿaql lil-Gharb?: Marx fī Istishrāq Edward Said*," must be read together since they are dialectical counterpart to one another other. The former reads Ibn Khaldūn analogically to Althusser's own treatment of Machiavelli, while the latter was a critique of poststructuralism ("al-bunyawiyya al-thaqāfiyya") by way of confronting the four pages Edward Said wrote on Marx in Orientalism.[227] The first book emphasizes the materialism of Ibn Khaldūn in line with what Amil elsewhere claimed

> epistemological struggle is a class struggle between a dominant thought and an antagonistic thought, or between a thought whose structure becomes an [epistemological] obstacle to scientific production, and another antagonistic thought whose structure opens up for a production of what is new in knowledge. [This creates] vast spaces of possibility, or rather, its structure is itself the structure of these spaces themselves[228] (MES, 62).

The second book locates class struggle within a "field of relations of knowledge production, which are relations of struggle and contradiction" (MES, 63). Together, the two books mark an intriguing return to Althusser's early work, such as Pour Marx and Althusser's references to his own lectures on Machiavelli. The book on Ibn Khaldūn is Amil's most eloquent critique of empiricism and positivism. In it, he reiterates the Bachelardian distinction between *common knowledge* (savoir) and scientific knowledge (ʿilm) (IFK, 42). The book on Orientalism quotes, and even extracts direct references from Althusser's "The Process of Theoretical Practice," in which Althusser distinguishes between the *real object* and the *object of knowledge* by contrasting *raw material* (mādda

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[227] This reading will be addressed in chapter 3.
[228] This statement finds its Althusserian counterpart in the following passage: "We must leave the ideological space defined by this ideological question, this *necessarily closed* space (since that is one of the essential effects of the *recognition* structure which characterizes the theoretical mode of production of ideology: the inevitably closed circle […] in order to open a new space on a different site - the space required for a *correct posing of the problem, one which does not pre judge the solution*." Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 54. Emphasis is Althusser's.

khām) from *theoretical concrete* (mādda mashghūla) (MES, 65). The book also critiques the idea of the site of production of knowledge being "individual or collective thought" (MES, 64). Its most interesting aspect is the four-and-a-half paged epilogue which Amil titled "*Notes for a Future Research: The Mechanism of Expansion in the Reproduction of Knowledge and Reproduction of Capitalism*" (Muqaddima li-Baḥth Lāḥiq: Aliyyat al-Tawassuʿ fī Iʿādat Intāj al-Maʿrifa wa-Iʿādat Intāj Raʿs al-Māl). These last few pages reveal Amil's topography in two arguments that mirror what he labelled a "double position of theory." The argument claim casts idealism and its tendencies (empiricism, positivism, teleology, Absolute Knowledge, Hegelian dialectic) as the "*mechanism of expansion of knowledge within the reproduction of dominant thought*," which, through its "infinite production" (that is, Althusser's characterization of knowledge), is nothing but the "*expansion mechanism itself of the reproduction of imperial capitalism"* (MES, 67). In order to break this "temporality of reproduction," which enforces this intellectual stagnancy (thabāt fikrī), the second argument tasks the revolutionary working class with a theoretical practice that confers its effectivity on truth and scientific knowledge in order to break away from and act upon [intellectual stagnancy]. In the final analysis, "*epistemological struggle is class struggle*" (MES, 61), since in this model, theoretical discourses influence theoretical ideologies, which in turn, dictate practical ideologies, influence ideological practice, and finally, inform political practice.[229]

[229] Balibar, "Althusser's Object," 173.

5. Politics

> […] philosophy is nevertheless not 'the servant of politics, as philosophy was once 'the servant of theology:' because of its position in theory and of its 'relative autonomy.'[230]

Althusser's definition of science, philosophy, and politics transform radically multiple times in his oeuvre, particularly before and after 1968. This is partly due to his eventual submission to his ambitious project of the reconfiguration of Spinoza's metaphysics in modern philosophy and politics,[231] but also due to constraints internal to his system. In addition to internal constraints (insisting on historical materialism to produce truths, without giving into Absolute Knowledge) Althusser was also subject to external constraints (pressure by the PCF and the Maoists).[232] The result of these constraints was the wholesale redefinition of the relationship of science to philosophy to politics. What was once considered to be the greatest merit of Marxism – its scientificity – was soon accused of being ascetic by his detractors. In insisting on theoretical novelty, rejecting any form of historical telos or a teleological philosophy of history, and disavowing the domain of the lived (experience), Althusser's philosophy was overburdened by the necessity of its own refinement.[233] The role that philosophy played as a "theory of theoretical practice" had lost any bearing on politics, and the simple choice between "politics or "ideology" was

[230] Louis. Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame. Lock (London: NLB, 1976), 58.
[231] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 117.
[232] Balibar, "Althusser's Object," 170.
[233] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 189.

therefore not the determining principle of the Marxist history of science qua science."[234] Amil, too, was critical of the effects of what some considered to be a Spinozist inheritance of the "disarming of politics"[235] in Althusser's project. However, is there any theoretical purchase in likening Althusser's "politics" *problem* to the same fate he bestowed to "his Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic" in that "the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes"?[236] Is politics simply relegated to the last instance? The real source of unease for Althusser's most polemical detractors, beyond the immediate question of the primacy of the theoretical over the political, or vice versa, lies in the two related premises. Following the argument that Althusser presented in *Lenin and Philosophy*, the first is that Marx's (and consequently Lenin's) theoretical revolutions were not only scientific *coupures* with previous thought which led to the formation of a new science of history, but that they transformed the definition of philosophy and its relation to politics. The political bearing lies in this transformation: instead of inaugurating a new philosophy, they instituted a new *practice* of philosophy.[237] Alain Badiou offers an astute (Badiousian) elaboration: "if philosophy is able to record what happens in politics, it is precisely because philosophy is not a theory of politics, but a *sui generis* activity of thought which finds itself conditioned by the events of real politics (events of the class struggle, in Althusser's vocabulary)."[238] This *separation* is indeed what distinguishes

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[234] Louis Althusser, François. Matheron, and G. M. Goshgarian, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966-67)* (London: Verso, 2003), 210–11.
[235] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 189.
[236] Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, Radical Thinkers (London ; New York: Verso, 2005), 113.
[237] Alain Badiou, "Althusser: Subjectivity without Subjects," in *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London; New York: Verso, n.d.), 59.
[238] Badiou, 62. Emphasis is Badiou's.

Althusser's philosophical singularity. Amil's definition of philosophy will proceed from this very characterization, as I will go on to show in this and the following sections of the current chapter while very visibly attempting to carve it out of its Althusserian or structuralist shell. The second point (which is where Amil begins to diverge from Althusser) lies in Althusser's rejection of the possibility of there being any "object" to politics or any "subject" (proletarian subject included) of history; in short, where the unfolding of history could be seen as moving towards a goal in order to actualize it. This is due to Althusser's definition of the categories of subject and object as *notions* (deemed ideological) as opposed to *concepts* (deemed scientific). Therefore, it is through the strictly (anti-teleological) historical process of structural causality (based on the uneven development of *Darstellung*, a "theater without an author") that the *pseudo-subject* (*structure*) could be constituted. Only in this light does *ideological practice* carry any weight.

The question of *subjects* and *objects* in Althusser requires further investigation, as it is the key to understanding the difference between Althusser and Amil, if not to revealing the "colonial" *problematic* overdetermining Amil's oeuvre. According to Badiou's reading of Althusser's *topographical framework*, there are three essential points which distinguish the latter's singularity. Remarkably, these three essential points map perfectly (excluding several key differences) onto Amil's three main "types" of contradictions (determinant "principal" contradiction, dominant "primary" contradiction, and secondary contradictions) and therefore attest to Amil's salient reading. The first Althusserian point is the "materialist determination by the economy, which provides a principle of massive stability […] the economy is the figure of objectivity, the place of the

object, and therefore the place of science."[239] This is what Amil conceptualized as the *determinate contradiction* (tanāquḍ muhaddid / principal "asāsī" contradiction) – the economic contradiction of forces and relations of production. In Amil's system, it is also the figure and place of objectivity, but not the sole place of science. Amil's doubling of the principle of unevenness (developmental unevenness "al-tafāwut al-taṭawurī" and structural unevenness "al-tafāwut al-bunyawī") implies the 'objectivity' and universality of knowledge is distinguished within various social formations. The second Althusserian point is the "imaginary syntheses, borne by individuals, who are nominal inexistents. This is the place of the subject, the place of ideology. It is also that of the State in its operational range, in its 'take' over singular bodies, in the functional (and not principally objective) existence of its apparatuses."[240] This is what for Amil is the *dominant contradiction* (tanāquḍ musayṭir / primary "raʾīsī" contradiction) – the political contradiction between two contradictory (naqīḍatayn) social forces, the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary. For Althusser, the *dominant contradiction* is also the place of ideology, and that of a "subjectivity" grasping at the objectivity of the economy. By contrast, for Amil, this grasping is strictly political, but in the "long temporality" sense, as the *real* of class struggle. Amil's dominant contradiction contains multiple levels (mustawayāt): ideological, economic, and political (in the "short temporality"[241] sense of class alliances, that reflect on the secondary contradictions). It is important to note that for Amil, this place is not simply the "statist" place of ideological subjectivation and interpellation, but also the

[239] Badiou, 65.
[240] Badiou, 65.
[241] For an informative comparison with Althusser's own version, please refer to the foreword of Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. Jacques Bidet and G. M Goshgarian (London; New York: Verso, 2014), xiii.

place of its contradiction by the opposing revolutionary forces. In addition, these different levels of structure do not have their own temporalities as found in Althusser.[242] The third and final critical Althusserian point is the

> eventual overdeterminations, catastrophes, revolutions, novelties, becoming-principal of the non-principal contradiction. […] And it must indeed be said that overdetermination belongs to the subjective realm (choice, partisanship, militancy), even though it knows no subject-effect (such effects are statist), nor does it verify, or construct, any object (such objects only exist in the field of science).[243]

Amil's differences with Althusser start to appear here. Amil's *secondary contradictions* (tanāquḍāt thānawiyya) mark the relationships of hegemony within each of the two opposing class alliances (revolutionary and counter-revolutionary class alliances). To elaborate, Amil reconfigured the last two Althusserian topographical points by first *dividing* the '*statist'* function of the dominant class (dominant in the dominant contradiction against the working class, and hegemonic in the secondary contradiction, against other bourgeois parties) and then *doubling* the place of *overdetermination* (hegemony of the revolutionary working-class party vis-a-vis other "leftist" parties in the revolutionary secondary contradiction, on the one hand, and opposing the dominance of the dominant ruling class in the dominant contradiction). Therefore, for Amil, both instances of politics are practiced within the social formation, as it is doubly articulated against *intra* and *inter*-class lines. Overdetermination here does not make of the secondary contradiction a primary one (each contradiction has its distinct "function" or "sphere"), but overdetermination does take place in each of them. Only when the communist party becomes hegemonic over its own class alliances, then it can effectively oppose the

[242] While in the third part of the TP Amil critiques Althusser regarding the latter's claim that different spheres in the structure have their own temporalities, Amil later makes use of Althusser's very temporal argument and cites him in Naqḍ al-Fikr al-Yawmī.
[243] Badiou, "Althusser: Subjectivity without Subjects," 65.

dominant class's effect of dislocating the political, ideological, and economic levels, and therefore fuse the levels into their axial political core. This realization of the dominance of the political contradiction, with the communist party at its helm, could break the structural framework determined by the economic contradiction, and then move the social formation along its historical process.

Amil's formulation is different in its configuration from Althusser's – and its implications are 'overdetermined' by the nature of Amil's specific stakes. The implications emerge out of Amil's construction of an *object of history* and diminishing the proximity of *science* and *politics* by interrelating their efficacies; in other words, reducing the gap between the *object of knowledge* and *object of history* on the same plane (while still maintaining the distinctness of the *object of thought* from the *real object*). For the object of knowledge, Amil's formulation necessarily constructs an object, that is science (Theory) and 'Truth' (scientific practice within the social formation), or differently phrased, thought must answer to the "necessity of history's object" (the realization of its scientificity, the creation of the conditions of the possibility of scientificity's realization) (NMS, 11). But in order for the objectivity to be grasped, Amil dismisses the false contradiction between the *objective character* (ṭābiʿ mawdūʿī) and *class character* (ṭābiʿ ṭabaqī) of history. Rather, he claims that "subjectivity of knowledge has a class basis, and its objectivity has a class character as well, and between the subjectivity of the class character, and its real objectivity, there is a class character" (NMS, 14).[244] By insisting that the "historical limits of knowledge are, in the final analysis, class limits," Amil advances his thesis that

[244] By subjectivity Amil means the "subjectivity of knowledge as the […] relationship of agreement between the class benefit of the [dominant] class, and the form of knowledge that its ideological practices of class struggle reach" (NMS, 13).

historical developments of knowledge are done by contradicting the (class) limits of knowledge: "we can say for the subjectivity, as well as objectivity of knowledge, there's materialist basis […] class struggle is necessarily present in knowledge, it is the historical motor of its objectivity (NMS, 17)." Against the bourgeois tendency of "subjectivizing the objectivity of knowledge during its time of crisis," revolutionary thought must exit the position that produces class blindness (ʿamā ṭabaqī), and

> transition to the class position of the objectivity of knowledge and its scientificity – from the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie to the viewpoint of the contradictory class, the proletariat – […] the class position which allows for the production of scientific knowledge, in the movement of constant struggle against the other class position (NMS, 18).

Although Amil begins the text without establishing a *subject*, and formulates revolutionary change as "history accomplishing its necessity" (NMS, 11), he concludes it by affirming that it is only the communist party that can lead such a practice: "party practice is what determines the political character of various class practices, which therefore determine the political character of theoretical practice" (NMS, 20). Although Althusser, too, claims that only political militants can grasp the thought of the political process in its relations[245] (in the 'subjective' realm of *partisanship* and *militancy*), Amil turns the *knowledge effect* into a proto-*subject effect* in his insistence on the communist party's role in *constituting* the effectivity of the masses. By claiming in the *Theoretical Prolegomena* that the revolutionary party is the (worker's) instrument of contradicting the dominant class's instrument (the *state apparatus*), the implication is that the revolutionary party's instrument comes to contradict the (*statist*) *constituted* subjectivity (the ideological materiality provided by the apparatus) by its immanent transformation into a *constitutive*

[245] Badiou, "Althusser: Subjectivity without Subjects," 60.

"subjectivity."[246] For Amil, the state is a necessary but transitive objective. In other words, a take-over of the state is a constitutive aspect of the socialist revolution. In order to do that however, the communist party is required to take over ideological apparatuses. The difference between Althusser and Amil boils down to ideology and the communist form: for Amil, the ideological apparatuses (and therefore, ideology) are not statist. The state apparatus is subsumed under the political reign of the dominant force. Youmna El-Eid alluded to this dimension of Amil's thought as she recalled what he was attempting to do with his (abandoned) project on a *theory of knowledge*: to "extricate [concepts] from structuralism and you work on [them] gradually to reach a relationship based on class."[247]

Despite Amil's wish to formulate a theory on structures of knowledge outside of structuralism, his critique of Althusser (*ISA* and *contradiction* in the first installment of the *Theoretical Prolegomena*) and Balibar (*transition* in the third unfinished installment) was based on how their structuralism and "theoreticism" *negated* (in its full *Hegelian* meaning) the possibility of political practice. The necessity of demarcating his theory from Althusser, Balibar, and Structuralism was not only 'external' (pressure from fellow members of the LCP and al-Ṭarīq readership) but was 'internal.' Evelyne Hamdan writes that Amil's membership to the LCP was not as unchallenged as he expected. There were "reservations by higher officials, who revealed their reluctance in welcoming "obstreperous thought laden with new ideas, which had recently made its way from France and Algeria, and had already been hastily (maybe too hastily) presumed, due to its

[246] Amil writes: "The state apparatus is a political instrument utilized by the dominant class to maintain its class domination, whereas the revolutionary party is the sole political instrument permitting the revolutionary working class to liberate from this class domination in order to liberate the social formation from all class domination" (OC, 78).
[247] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

revolutionary positions, to be triumphant of Althusser's thought" (HSF, 444). Despite "the persistence of the old guard," even after the 1968 congress which breathed new life into the LCP, the accusations against Amil never ceased, particularly in response to his dense usage of the concept of structure (HSF, 467n56). Amil's critique of the "theoreticism" of Althusser's early works, which were the site of the latter's Spinozistic excess, was the result of Amil perceiving Althusser's definition of the relationship between theoretical practice and political practice as ambivalent. Amil's central disagreement with Althusser revolved around the former's designation of the political contradiction as the "primary contradiction," where the ideological occupies a "structural level" as part of the "social formation's dominant contradiction."[248] Amil's relationship to Althusser's work in the latter's post-1968 phase is noteworthy. Amil inconsistently made use of Althusser's concepts but regularly challenged them. This phase, characterized by Althusser's supplementation of his epistemology with historical ontology, followed after the launch of his *Reading Capital* and *For Marx* and shortly after the release of his "Ideological State Apparatus" (ISA) essay. The famous ISA text, which is considered to represent Althusser's response to the 1968 protests in France, transformed his proposition of the epistemological distinction between science and ideology to one that relegated the entire domain of lived experience to ideology wherein "ideological apparatuses" interpellate individuals.[249] Amil's objection, which was shared by many of Althusser's detractors, was based on the

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[248] The next chapter will deal with Amil's primary, principal, and secondary contradictions at length.

[249] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 120–30.

rejection of Althusser's likening the role of the revolutionary party to that of an ISA.[250] However, Amil's rejection did not amount to a disavowal of Althusser's concept of ISA. Instead, he appropriated the concept and stripped it of its primary function (ideology), and named it *state apparatus* (jihāz al-dawla). Amil's version of the *state apparatus*, which is the primary *political instrument* (adāt siyāsiyya) of the dominant class, functions as a repressive *political apparatus* (jihāz siyāsī qamʿī) and an *ideological apparatus* (jihāz aydiyūlūjī). Because the ideological contradiction (and therefore ideological struggle) is subordinate to the political contradiction (and political struggle), the *ideological apparatus* is therefore subordinated to the *political apparatus* (OC, 93). For Amil, a bourgeois "[political] party is only an apparatus for the dominant class and not for the revolutionary proletariat" (OC, 83), and is therefore subordinate to the *state apparatus*. Therefore, far from an *apparatus*, the revolutionary party is the only *political* (and therefore *ideological,* because *ideological struggle is political*) instrument of the working class.

Amil's largest grievance with Althusser is the latter's omission of, and failure of accounting for, class struggle. Amil's position is largely an effect of the influence of 1968 on his relation to pedagogy and academic institutions. In Amil's incomplete third installment to the *Theoretical Prolegomena*, he reiterates his critique of Althusser in the relation to the absence of class struggle. This time, he invokes the ambiguity of the role of the political in Althusser's "Reply to John Lewis" and extends his critique of the "structuralist tendency" to Structuralism's conceptual structure as a whole:

> […] in a footnote, [Althusser] mentions the importance of undertaking an analysis of these apparatuses in light of their relationship with the movement of class struggle, without undertaking such analysis. [...] and this, by itself, proves that the

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[250] The source of this confusion was addressed in a footnote above. I would like to add that it is peculiar that Amil never revisited his critique after the publishing of Althusser's clarificatory note. Georges Labica, or through Amil's friendship with Georges Labica who

> logic of Structuralism lacks the analytic tool that allows it to undertake this analysis, which is the concept of class struggle, as in, the concept of the political contradiction, which becomes coherent on the very basis of [this concept's] absence, of the conceptual structure in the logic of structuralism. (FTT, 53-4).

In spite of being superficially reminiscent of Rancière's infamous denunciation of his ex-master, Althusser, in *Althusser's Lesson,*[251] Amil's critique of Althusser differs in that it considers political struggle to be *decentered* (intibāthī, centrifugal force) from the process of class struggle in de Gaulle's 1960s France. This was due to "the domination of de Gaulle's rule and his attempt to seclude the communists and foil their revolutionary struggle, in order to achieve a class alliance with the socialists in particular" (TKM, 29). But against this centrifugal force, "the intense popular uprising (intifāda) that France witnessed year 1968" was *centripetal* (inṣihārī), which is to say that the political struggle confronted the centrality of class struggle. Amil continues: "particularly after the joint programs reached by the communists and the socialists, which had a large effect in transitioning the dominant class from the position of offense to a position of defense" (TKM, 20). Amil credits this political practice on the theoretical practice of non-Marxists such as "Levi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Bachelard, Canguilhem, Koyré, and others" (TKM, 19) – "[…] it is not strange to see that the process of concept renewal proceeds in thought along with political practice. In this instance of class alliances, for example, theoretical practice joined political practice" (TKM, 20). It is precisely because of his agreement with Althusser on the constituted *statist* effectivity of ideology that Amil says: "Althusser was right in saying [that] the presence of a state apparatus determines

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[251] Amil's answer to these would be: viewpoint of proletariat, political contradiction and class struggle, and the revolutionary party. Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Continuum, 2011), 122.

every ideological apparatus as an ideological apparatus such as the state's" (OC, 206). Amil's project is built on its own claims to scientificity and the requirement of offering something to the proletarian revolutionaries. Therefore, he refuses to relegate the role of theoretical practice to a

> thought controlled by the logic of the dominant class, to 'university' (al-jāmiʿī) *academic thought*, since scientific thought does not form in Arab thought from within the ideological state apparatuses, such as universities, but is formed outside of it, as well as by critique waged through the revolutionary practices of the working class and its vanguard party (AHA, 233).

The role of education as a potential proletarian ideological *instrument* for class struggle appears in Amil's writings on public education in Lebanon. Amil's references to 1968 as an example was not intended as a recognition of the revolutionary potential of the student protestors, for he critiqued the "nihilist position" championing the slogan of "destruction of the university," as though "preventing this ideological apparatus occurs through the obstructing of the process of education" (OC, 208). The other side of the nihilist position was, for Amil, the "opportunist position," which championed the "illusory" (wahmī) slogan of the 'student power' (al-sulṭa al-tullābiyya), which in turn, was based on an ideological fantasy isolating ideological power from political power (OC, 208). The final slogan, "power to the imagination" (al-sulṭa lil-khayāl), occurs when the pseudo-revolutionary (mutathawira) practice fails to reach actual power and finds in imagination the effective weapon of fantasy (OC, 208). Being a university instructor himself and heavily committed in the role of proletarian ideological practice in education, Amil continues by shifting his critique to the local context:

> Reaching ideological power happens through reaching political power, not in the occupation of administrations as some of our students in the Lebanese University fantasize [yatawaham]. Additionally, the school is not a factory, and the occupation of the former is not at all similar to the occupation of the latter. The incidents of

> May in France show the radical difference between two forms of struggle that share resemblance. In the working class's occupation of the factories, as in its collective (even if temporary) appropriation of means of production is a direct threat on the material basis atop of which the dominant class's domination rests, and is therefore political. Whereas the occupation of the Lebanese University's administration, for example, does not mean anything, except to reveal a juvenile illusion that this administration, in its materiality (as in its offices, chairs, tables, telephones…etc.), is like the factory, a means of production in the process of 'ideological production'!! (OC, 208-9).

According to Elias Shaker, the events of 1968 had an effect on a small number of members of the LCP, mostly on the ones who studied in France or were interested in the question of student movements. The new leadership of the party was more interested in militant activity than the need to start a 'student revolution.'[252] Amil was not part of these debates at the time, but his position could be extrapolated from his writing on education. Amil began teaching secondary-level philosophy in a public school in Saida, but he left in 1975-6 at the beginning of the war, and transferred to the Lebanese University where he taught until 1987.[253] A person active within the cultural scene in the 1970s-80s who wished to remain nameless recalled attending his classes at the Lebanese University and struggling to find a place to sit in the full room. However, despite Amil's public status, the Lebanese University administration regularly "fought with him and attempted to disrupt his sessions," partly on account of his writings on public education in Lebanon.[254] Amil advocated the "democratization of education" (dimukratiyyat al-taʿlīm), which he explained as "liberation of education" given the place of education in the struggle of ideological tendencies (OC, 211-2). The appropriation of public schooling was, for Amil, one "strategy" for countering the *statist* ideological apparatus. This involved the

[252] Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.
[253] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[254] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

"annulment of [these] apparatuses in reinforcing the ideological dominant, of the dominant class, on the development of social consciousness" and the "use of these apparatuses against the ruling class itself, as in reaching a level in the development of class struggle which empowers the working class to *use these apparatuses, or parts of it, as instruments in its revolutionary ideological practice*, in its class struggle against the class domination of the dominant class" (OC, 207, emphasis is mine). Therefore, Amil views the revolutionary party as an instrument rather than an apparatus, regardless of its constitution by the state. In this sense, the revolutionary party is both the *political* and *ideological* instrument of the revolutionary party. It is a political instrument insofar as it organizes the masses, and an ideological one insofar as it forms its own "school." Amil explains why the revolutionary party is not an *apparatus*, but an *instrument*:

> Althusser's error resides in his reading that the revolutionary communist party is an apparatus like the rest of the dominant class's parties. He does not construct the class boundary, and therefore the dividing epistemological boundary, between the working-class party and the other parties. It is the structuralist tendency which prevents him from seeing the relationship of difference between the two contradictory [classes] in the Marxist dialectic, and therefore, the objective differential relation in the interconnection of the structural levels in the social formation between the [contradicting] viewpoints of the contradicting classes. And in its different permutations, this error finds its origin in the lack of understanding the particular theoretical position of the political contradiction in the social formation. Bettelheim falls repeats the same mistake by considering the revolutionary party to be an apparatus (OC, 77n1).[255]

While Amil inherited Althusser's problem of defining politics – particularly, in his adoption of the history of science of French historical epistemology and the structural Marxism and anti-humanism of Althusser, along with its Spinozist rational materialist

[255] The Bettelheim's article to which Amil is referring is: Charles Bettelheim and Paul Sweezy, "Dictature Du Prolétariat Classes Sociales et Idéologie Prolétarienne," *Les Temps Modernes* 27, no. 297 (April 1971). (OC, 77n1).

undercurrents – it would be wrong to claim that Amil's own philosophical "singularity," in both its coherence and problems, is the same as in Althusser. Amil had a radical solution to his problem, and it lied in a different reading of Lenin, which he justified in terms of his *specification from the universal* – the establishment of a differential relation between science and politics, and (perhaps, indirectly) the objective presence of a subject of history. However, this proposed solution has a different set of implications which pertain to enlightenment thought. Amil's concept of politics radically departs from that of Althusser since, on one level, it does not share the status of having a non-object (as in Althusser's concept of philosophy). On another level, Amil elevates the political above the economical within the social formation (in his theorization of the dominant contradiction). To elaborate, Amil designates the political, rather than the economic, which is historically static (it is tied to the mode of production), as the central or "primary" contradiction. For Amil, the task is not to determine the theoretical position of theoretical practice, neither in terms of the former conception of philosophy as a "theory of theoretical practice," nor in the latter "representation of the class struggle with the sciences."[256] Rather, it is to account for the development of class struggle within the sciences, and a class struggle within the *historicity* of epistemological struggle, which lies in the theoretical position of political practice itself. Only by determining the theoretical determination of the political in the social structure, can the interconnection between theoretical practice, political practice, and ideology in the general framework of class struggle be revealed (TKM, 18). Amil claims Althusser precisely failed to recognize the centrality of the political, which "led [the latter] down a perverted theoretical slope," to the dislocation of theoretical practice to a realm

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[256] Badiou, "Althusser: Subjectivity without Subjects," 61. Alain Badiou, Althusser: Subjectivity without Subjects, Metapolitics, p.61.

outside of the political, and outside of class struggle (TKM, 19). Amil's claim here is that the theoretical is perverted when the centrality of the political is not assumed, or in the other words, when the "dominant" political contradiction is relegated to the "determinant" economic contradiction. He accused both Althusser and Poulantzas of understanding the nature of class struggle from the "viewpoint of the dominant class," which is proof of the strength of "the ideology of the dominant class in subjecting revolutionary thought to its control" (OC, 94). In a subsection of his *Theoretical Prolegomena* titled "*A Class Viewpoint: Critique of the Structuralist Tendency*" (OC, 190), Amil traces this problem to the problem of structuralism; namely, its *superpositional* (tarākubī, therefore a variation of the *synthetic* in Hegel), rather than a *fusional*[257] (inṣihārī, what Amil considered to be a *combinatory* view of the political) understanding of structural relations: "failing to construct the demarcating class boundary between what we called the superspositional [tarākubi] form of the social formations' interconnection of structural levels, and the fusional form of this interconnection, which is in the end, the difference between the [opposing] viewpoints of the two contradictory class (TKM, 19). Amil makes a similar argument elsewhere:

> The religious wars in the middle ages, for example, were not but historically determinate forms of the political struggle, as in, class struggle. Put differently: the religious struggle of that pre-capitalist social formation was the historical form in which class struggle appeared and disappeared. This is why the principal economic contradiction is always the *determinate contradiction* in the class-based social formation, and the political contradiction is the *dominant contradiction*, as in, the [contradiction] that is its motor of development. The relation of domination is

[257] Amil's use of the term *fusion* is not accidental. In the second installment of his article on al-Istiʿmar wal-Takhalluf, he rejects the use of synthesis (تراكب), accusing it of being a Hegelian remnant in Marx. The reason for this is that the Hegelian dialectic does not fully transform the elements but keeps them distinct. Amil substitutes *synthesis* with *combinasion* (tamāzuj, تمازج, or *Verbindung*) since it is a "radical transformation of its constituent elements, i.e. production of a cohesive new unit that differs from the sum of its constituent elements." (ITN, 105).

> different from the relation of determination between contradictions, and it is not theoretically sound to subsume the former under the latter, as is apparent in the works of Althusser, because [in this subsumption] the role of class struggle, as in the class struggle between classes, in the formation of history is negated. It also renders an understanding of mutations of the structure (al-qafzāt al-bunyawiyya), as in revolutions, impossible. This is the danger of *Structuralism* in understanding history (HKY, 83).

The objectivity of the political contradiction and Amil's combinatory fusion, in turn, determines another difference: *class domination* (al-ṣayṭara al-tabaqiyya) and *class hegemony* (al-haymana al-ṭabaqiyya), particularly their inscription within internal contradictions marked by intrinsic unevenness in development. Here Amil is indebted to Poulantzas' 1968 book *Pouvoir politique et classes sociales de l'état capitaliste*. However, Amil's symptomatic reading of the various philosophers to which he is indebted, including Poulantzas, does not entail a simple reading of one work through another, or one work against itself, but is a doubly articulated process of reading what is not present in one text against what is not present in another. Amil's work on contradiction reads the absences in Mao, Lenin, Althusser, and Poulantzas by reading them against one other. For Amil, they all fail to offer in thinking the conditions of possibility of theorizing "takhalluf." Almost all his mentions of these philosophers refer to what is lacking in their accounts. However, it is often framed in comparing one's work against another. Despite their various differences, the importance of Althusser's and Poulantzas' debates on contradiction for Amil lies, not only in their understanding of a mode of production, but in drawing the contours for political practice, as well as theoretical practice, in an 'impeded' structure of thought and a subordinate social formation. Amil, in particular, equates the theoretical work of illustrating these contradictions to theoretical practice. Despite the differences in Althusser's and Amil's definitions of economism, both thinkers saw the opportunism

dominant in politics as detrimental for political practice. For example, in For Marx, Althusser depicts the opportunists in the Second International whom Engels struggled against as "awaiting the arrival of socialism through the action of the economy alone."[258] Similarly, Amil dedicated an article on opportunists, writing "it is idealist Hegelian thought – not Marxist-Leninist thought – which is the thought practiced by the petit bourgeoisie 'leftists' in their 'theoretical streaks' […] in their appealing to the 'progressive regimes.'" Amil describes the absence of the theoretical restricts the work of the petit bourgeoise to a "general 'recipe' or 'medical prescription,' which solves the puzzles of the various distinct Arab societies with an acrobatic intellectual movement whose secret is the sole possession of these 'imperious expounders'" (HKY, 70). In the same article, Amil proceeds to refer to the Althusserian obfuscation of class struggle as economicist, and reads it against with the opposing extreme of voluntarism by "[locating] the latter [political or dominant contradiction] in the former [economic or determinant contradiction], or confusing them for one another, or else this leads to what could be called as 'the inflation of the political' in the social formation, which leads directly to a voluntarist interpretation of the development of history" (HKY, 84). Against an economicist or voluntarist relation of theoretical practice to political practice, Amil proposes:

> [the] politicization of the contradictions, which is the effect of the dominance of the revolutionary class political practice, where the structural levels of the social formation interconnect in a fusional form, in a precisely opposite form to that of the superpositional form of interconnection, which is the effect of the domination of the political practice of the dominant class (OC, 191-2).

In summary, Amil's version of class struggle is: 1- "a central movement in the development of the social formation, where the political contradiction is the dominant

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[258] Althusser, *For Marx*, 213.

contradiction in the development of social contradictions" and 2- "[p]olitical practice [a]s the primary practice under which, and in whose service, economic and ideological practices are subordinated" (OC, 76-7). Although Amil's version of politics did not suffer the same fate as Althusser's in relation to party politics, it did, however, share the latter's ambiguity and opacity. Their mutual rejection of the "opacity of the immediate"[259] despite not being a barrier to science, guaranteed the difficulty in penetrating their versions of politics.

Amil, much like Althusser, critiqued the discipline of political science for being *statist* (OC, 180); hence, incapable of generating any political effects. However, for Amil, political theory could stand to contribute to the revolutionary party on the condition that it theorizes the political contradiction without conflating the state for the dominant political forces. He also claims that scientific practice against the political institutions of the state contributes to the diminishing the ideological effect of the "Amil, like Althusser, rejected empiricist, phenomenological, and idealist philosophy on the grounds of the impossibility of their transposition into (revolutionary) politics. This entailed the borrowing, on the part of Althusser and Amil, of "bourgeois" concepts. Their employment of these concepts, however, was partisan and therefore proceeded differently from the bourgeoisie – it was a matter of which side is 'employing' them. The impetus of the political points to another problem residing in their assertions that production of knowledge takes place solely in abstraction. The irony here is that despite his animosity towards idealism, Althusser

[259] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 189.

betrays a quintessentially Enlightenment faith in thought's capacity to produce political effects:[260]

> if the process of knowledge does not transform the real object, but only transforms its perception into concepts and then into a thought-concrete, and if all this process takes place, as Marx repeatedly points out, "*in thought* ", *and not in the real object*, this means that, with regard to the real object, in order to know it, 'thought' operates on the transitional forms which designate the real object in the process of transformation in order finally to produce a concept of it, the thought-concrete.[261]

The same could be said of Amil. However, while Althusser considers the critical subject of Kantian philosophy as part of the bourgeois juridical subject, and therefore tries to develop a non-juridical version of philosophy, Amil unwittingly argues for the opposite. In the first section of his introduction to the *Theoretical Prolegomena*, Amil states that the first task for Marxist-Leninist revolutionary thought is to undergo a "Kantian revolution" – to "enact what Kant did within the history of philosophy by critiquing methods of knowledge, which is a condition for the attainment of knowledge" (CMP, 299). Amil grants revolutionary thought the power to "establishes the rights of the sciences, for it poses the question of rights and answers it by outlining legal rights to scientific knowledge."[262] This does not seem to pose a threat for Amil's project. Unlike Althusser's project, which is premised on the avoidance of a non-juridical philosophy– one that departs from Kantian critique – Amil […]. This is based on his conviction that the bourgeoisie is not truly political, but is rather part of a form of juridical ideology.[263] The second step after this "Kantian revolution," for Amil, is for 'Arab' thought to implement the critique of knowledge through a class

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260 Peden, 185.
261 Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 192.
262 Althusser, Matheron, and Goshgarian, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 127.
263 Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 185.

analysis in order to align itself with the national liberation movement (CMP, 300). Amil tries to get away with this peculiar assertion by invoking his Marxism-Leninism thesis of the specification of the "theoretical structure" of the colonized, which is privileged in its right to conduct its theoretical practice not necessarily in conjunction with thought "as reached in advanced capitalist countries." His invocation of Kantian epistemological problematics begin to lose their grounding. Amil is not constrained by Althusser's account of the political since in Amil's account the political is the "primary" determinant contradiction. The "Enlightenment" character of Amil's work is palpable and it expresses the fundamentally political character he ascribed to it, as seen in his championing of rationality and dismissal of the Arab Nahda. Amil's rendering of the mechanism of production of science and political (acts) is best summarized in this line from his third edition preface to the *Theoretical Prolegomena* in 1980:

> I was and still am attempting to undertake two interconnected processes at once: [1-] the process of production of scientific knowledge through the mechanism of the colonial development of capitalism in our Arab society, and through the mechanism of class struggle particular to this development, which is to say, the development of this distinguished historical form of capitalism within which it is the mechanism of the national liberation movement with. [2-] The process of producing the means of production of this knowledge (TP, 13).

C. Reading: Theoretical Practice as Party Practice

Amil's conceptual mode of production is first and foremost a study and practice of conceptual formation rather than a political philosophy. His recourse to the question of structure is primarily motivated by the status of thought – and of theory as "bunya fikriyya," (structure of thought) – and its relation to social and historical structure. If the objective for Amil was to cancel the mediation between theory and practice, then he had to first outline the method of locating the 'site' of theory within a process of (theoretical)

production. Therefore, the projects of national liberation and the emancipation from capitalism did not hinge on the ability to map abstract conceptual systems of thought, but rather, concerned the practice of their production and the process of their practice. This relation between theoretical practice and political practice was ultimately a Leninist question. Despite the differences between Amil and Althusser, both thinkers were united by not merely an engagement with, but also an intervention in, Lenin's theoretical practice to reveal what Warren Montag called a Lenin beyond Lenin.[264] For example, Amil partook in a panel organized by al-Ṭarīq in 1970 in celebration of Lenin's centennial. He also dedicated the last chapter in his article "On Contradiction" on the significance of the scientificity of Marxism-Leninism, and how it allows for thinking the specific in relation to its universality.[265] While both Althusser and Amil drew lines of demarcation within Lenin to highlight the importance of theoretical practice, Amil's reading of Lenin also served the purpose of validating the particularity of his own "structuralist" reading of the CMoP by placing it within a Leninist understanding of universalism. The article published was originally a response to one of several debates on Lenin to be organized by al-Ṭarīq[266] – Lenin was the central figure in much of the debates on theory and practice. The contours of defining class struggle, at that moment, took on a form of class struggle in reading Lenin. Amil read Lenin in order to reveal a differential Lenin. He produced a reading of Lenin

[264] Warren Montag, "Althusser's Lenin," *Diacritics* 43, no. 2 (2015): 50.
[265] The article published in al-Ṭarīq in 1970 is titled "Lenin and the Importance of Revolutionary Practice for Achieving Theoretical Activity." The book chapter is titled "Universalism and Particularism in Marxism-Leninism."
[266] Further engagement with these al-Ṭarīq debates were cut short by the October 17 uprising in Lebanon, as well as the spread of COVID-19, which prevented me from accessing periodicals held at the American University of Beirut and in the al-Ṭarīq offices in Beirut.

that was not only different from Althusser's reading, but also different from the Lebanese Communist Party's reading.

Elias Shaker recalls the heated debates that were held as a result of Amil's insistence that "theory needs to inform practice," against the desire of the other members of the party who "want[ed] to immediately practice in the field of politics without any engagement with philosophy."[267] Amil distinguished the "theoretical" from the "philosophical" for Lenin by invoking Marx's famous 11th Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."[268] By distinguishing between "Lenin the thinker and Lenin the philosopher" (LAP,[269] 24-5), Amil insisted on the importance of the former in its relation to revolutionary activity, while also giving the latter importance in a separate field of struggle: ideological practice (al-mumārasa al-ʿaydiyūlūjiya) (LAP, 18-19). Amil was highly dismissive of "philosophy" in general – as is evident in his reading of Marx's Theses – and relegated philosophers to the realm of the ideological (he referred to them as the "ideologues of the bourgeoisie, the academic philosophers") (LAP, 16). Although Amil claimed that Lenin never wrote strictly "independent" philosophical works, he regarded Lenin's philosophical interventions as part of a necessary ideological struggle in one of the primary fields of struggle (LAP, 18-19). For Amil, (the political contradiction of) the capitalist social formation has multiple levels: the economic, the political, and the ideological. In Amil's words: "philosophical practice for Lenin was an ideological struggle against bourgeois ideology [...] because

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267 Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.
268 Karl Marx, "Thesis on Feuerbach," in *MECW*, vol. 5, Marx Engels Collected Works (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 5. Emphasis is Marx's.
269 Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Linīn wa-Ahammiyyat al-ʿAmaliyya al-Thawriyya fī Taḥqīq al-Nashāt al-Naẓarī / لينين واهمية العملية الثورية في تحقيق النشاط النظري," *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 29, no. 1 (January 1970): 16–25.

ideological struggle, as Lenin understood it, was one of the forms of class struggle, class struggle in its core is a political struggle (LAP, 19).” Amil's peers perceived his theoreticism as a theoreticism for the sake of theoreticism. For him, however, this theoreticism was necessary for guiding the political practice of the party to fend off the ideology of the colonial bourgeoisie and create class "consciousness"[270] based on a scientific theory. Amil's way forward lied in theoretical practice, which *was* political practice, because it constituted a specific form of political struggle. Furthermore, theoretical practice was not only restricted to thinking political practice, but it was also a theory for scientific practice. Since theoretical practice is linked to class struggle in an epistemological field, then theoretical practice was a form of proletarian ideological practice (TKM, 25). Theoretical practice is linked to the form of class struggle of its own social formation; therefore, it carried a double character. It was at once the practice of producing knowledge and the practice of countering dominant ideology. These two faces of theoretical practice were constantly present, and one could come in the place of the other. Amil argued that if, by contrast, theoretical practice overlooked its basis in class struggle, then it risked falling into *ectopic* bourgeois ideological practice (TKM, 16-7). Therefore, theoretical practice needed to yield a double-edged sword, as both a "form of [ideological practice], and its contradiction at once" (TKM, 16-7). This sword – a weapon like Arthur's Excalibur – could only be wielded by a singular 'subject:' "the revolutionary working-class party, that is, the Marxist-Leninist party" (OC, 92).

The production of this thought was not a simple reinterpretation of Marx and Lenin for the purposes of adapting their thought to an official party-doctrine. Rather, Amil joins a

[270] I use the term consciousness here loosely. Amil had used the term sparingly throughout his work, despite rejecting humanist Marxism.

league of communist figures – like Althusser in France or Tronti in Italy – who sought in that specific historical moment to start a "revolution within the revolution."[271] Their relative independence from the official party line informed Marxist-Leninist critiques of the party-form itself, which sought to revise the variance between reformism and revolution. Although the parties of Althusser and Tronti belonged to the only two countries in Western Europe in which communism was organized as a mass ideology and explicitly challenged the power of the ruling bourgeoisie,[272] the LCP was also part and parcel of the same unfolding of global capitalism and the disintegration of state socialism. Geopolitically, the LCP belonged to the "camp" of socialism within capitalist countries as opposed to countries with a Communist Party in power (Soviet Union, China…etc.). Historically, however, the difference between European communism and CPs in the Arab appears in the guise of a structural lag in temporality (a lag or a stunted development), which necessitated a theorization of the temporalization of history. If European communism was marked by a "triangular" confrontation between communism, fascism, and liberalism in the prewar period, and the defeat of communist internationalism and decolonization in the postwar period (the Cold War and its consequent aftermath),[273] then for the LCP, among other 'Third-World' Communist parties, it was the integrating of both at the same time.[274] The Second Congress of the Lebanese Communist Party in 1968 came

[271] The term was originally the title of a 1967 publication by Régis Debray "*Revolution dans la revolution?*." Debray's publication informed Amil's reading of the *takhalluf* of communist parties in colonial society (HSF, 468n60). Étienne Balibar, "A Point of Heresy in Western Marxism Althusser's and Tronti's Antithetic Readings of Capital in the Early 1960s," in *The Concept in Crisis: Reading Capital Today* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 97–98.
[272] Balibar, 97.
[273] Balibar, 97.
[274] This is not to say that anti-fascism was not an active struggle. In fact, al-Ṭarīq was founded in 1942 by a group of intellectuals as a " رسالة ثقافية تصدرها عصبة مكافحة النازية

after two decades and a half of authoritarian and undemocratic rule within the party and the direct implementation of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. Despite the protests of many members over the years, the LCP had aligned itself with the Soviet Union's decision to support the 1948 partition of Palestine, and maintained an ambivalent stance on Arab nationalism.[275] The growing rift between Abdel Gamal Nasser's nationalist (qawmi) line and the Arab communists' stance exploded after the defeat of the 1967 June War. Elias Shaker described the second congress:

> self-critique after the defeat. The second congress took place because of its internal crisis, namely that it was not able to hold a congress. The party started in 1924 and held its first congress in 1943 during independence. The second congress was in 1968 – that is 25 years! The primary critique of the CP was that it existed for 25 years without a congress. Members and critics contested the claims of a *democratic bureaucracy* (markaziyya dimukratiyya) and said it was a "bureaucracy without democracy, where is democracy?" This critique, the title of a report of addressing the crisis of the party: "25 years without a congress." […] There were divergences *right-right*, *left-left*, that lead to the hindering of the communist movement from and this reflected on the national liberation movement. Starting from this point, the considered that holding the congress was part of struggle against imperialism and for democracy. The relation between the benefit of the party and the benefit of the people. […] The congress was an attempt to come up with a corrective to the nationalist line (al-khat al-qawmi) – the national causes (al-qadaya al-qawmiyya) were the Palestinian cause, Arab unity, liberation, and so on. […] Be careful here: "correcting the CP's nationalist line" (taṣḥīh al-khat al-qawmī li al-ḥizb al-shuyūʿī) is not the same thing as "correcting the CP's stance on the national causes" (taṣḥīh mawqif al-ḥizb al-shuyūʿī min al-qadāya al-qawmiyya). The communist party does not have a nationalist line, it has an internationalist line (khat umami). Now, there were communists who deduced that the line was nationalist, rejected internationalism, and advocated for the merger with pan-Arabism. And when did this come? At a time when Arab nationalism was itself splitting into Left and Right leanings. The CP recognized that there were multiples causes, like the nationalist cause, that were unresolved. The global /

والفاشستية في سوريا ولبنان" (cultural letter published by 'The Anti-Nazi and Anti-Fascist League in Syria and Lebanon'"). After the defeat of Nazism and fascism, the advent of Marshal Plan in the US and Europe, the labelling of the Soviet Union as the only remaining evil in the world, and the construction of the state of Israel, al-Ṭarīq heralded a new mission under the banner of "حركة السلم" . Shaker, Elias. Interview.

[275] Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 38–39.

> internationalist revolution was to come to resolve it with the shift in the balance of world powers. The communists were lost between the nuances of these political struggles. […] The third congress came 4 years after the second. [It] focused more on the internal Lebanese situation and on affirming the formation of the Arab front – the anti-imperialist one.[276]

In this light, Amil's interventions on the subject of practice are to be taken as critiques of the Comintern's traditional "two typical 'tactics' of communist revolutions" – the "popular front" tactic and the "class against class tactic."[277] This was owing to the differential mode of production of Arab society: the former tactic was insufficient as the double-natured menace of imperialism and colonialism required a coordinated treatment, whereas the latter tactic was impossible as the "non-consolidated class structure" (of colonial social structures) was considered by Amil to be a challenge for organized political practice. The "revolution within the revolution" was not only a critique of Stalinist theoretical dogmatism and political opportunism, but a call for militant intellectuals to reinstate a revolutionary program befitting the specific historical context. It is interesting here to compare Amil to Althusser and Tronti. Whereas Althusser emphasized the *autonomy of theory* "as a way to transform the concept of science into an apparatus for the analysis of the unpredictable conjunctures, at the cost perhaps of a disproportionate epistemological and speculative detour,"[278] and Tronti emphasized the *autonomy of politics* "which transfers it from one 'part' to another in the antagonistic relationship of power established by capital, at the cost perhaps of a reduction of agency to decision, and the identification of the site of politics with a single place," then Amil's response to this

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[276] Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.
[277] Balibar, "A Point of Heresy in Western Marxism Althusser's and Tronti's Antithetic Readings of Capital in the Early 1960s," 97.
[278] Balibar, 108–9.

antinomy of theory and politics was a refusal of choice. This refusal of choice reflects the inseparability of his two object(s): scientific practice and political practice.

As a staunch believer in the party-form, Amil believed in the CP as the revolutionary force of history, not only for its role as an antagonistic force against the ruling bourgeoisie in the field of the political, but also because he considered to be the only party capable of "theoretical practice, that is, the production of scientific consciousness of the movement of revolutionary history" (TKM, 15). Historical consciousness, for Amil, is "not an individual, but collective, consciousness. It is generated through a complex process of class struggle, which must be led by a working class organized through a revolutionary organization" (TKM, 15). Unlike Althusser, who declared in "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy" that philosophy, much like politics, shares the same (non-)object,[279] Amil explicitly declared that the object of politics is class struggle and the object of philosophy is class struggle in ideology. By restricting the conditions of critique and theoretical practice to the party waging class struggle, Amil restricts the ability to theorize the colonial relation, and therefore to theorize the process of national liberation, to the CP. Amil explains that

> it is the communist party that must practice this class struggle which reaches in its ideological practice, a theoretical practice that produces the necessary scientific knowledge. *This scientific knowledge is actually already present in the political practice of the LCP party* specifically, particularly after its historical second congress. (TKM, 11. Emphasis Amil's).

Despite his use of Althusserian political terms (*viewpoint, militants, partisanship, class,* and *class struggle*) – terms that Althusser used to index the "fleeting identity of politics"[280]

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[279] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 180.
[280] Badiou, "Althusser: Subjectivity without Subjects," 64.

– Amil's use of the word *struggle* was different from Althusser's in that it was close to constituting a political object, and therefore an object to politics.[281] This was impossible for Althusser, for whom the claim that philosophy directly thinks the political would automatically submit philosophy to the objectivity of the State.[282] By contrast, Amil's insistence on the "revolutionary party, as the working class's organization, is the *guiding mind* of this class's revolutionary force into the political practice of class struggle" (OC, 77, emphasis mine)[283] submits knowledge to the 'objectivity' of the revolutionary party. Objectivity, in this sense, is "the capacity of thought to look into social reality from the revolutionary viewpoint, which history tasks with the necessity of changing reality, in order for history to effectuate its necessity" (NMS, 11). Elsewhere, Amil writes:

> It is ordinary for the communist party to start from the actual reality of the movement of class struggle by demarcating its general revolutionary class line, as in, by crystalizing its revolutionary strategy. The process of the production of our Marxist-Leninist thought is then, this *party*'s process of drawing a revolutionary class line, as in, instituting a revolutionary strategy of the movement of class struggle. Theoretical practice is, then, *class practice*. And the scientific *knowledge* of historical movement is produced by a *class*-conscious activity that deals with this materialist movement [of history] from the class viewpoint. Theoretical practice must achieve the necessity of history, because, in its class process, which is determined by the movement of class struggle within a specific social formation, is not but this historical necessity itself. Marx started a revolutionary epistemological break with the thought that preceded him when he extricated thought from its activity of reflection, and committed it, through its scientific activity, with the *practical* task that is the materialist transformation of the world…Therefore, there is no way for our scientific thought to be neutral in relation to this process. Rather, it is obligated to it by the production of its knowledge. This commitment is a condition for its attainment of a universal character. It cannot undertake this production process unless it is, in the movement

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[281] He later revises this claim in light of growing disenchantment during the civil war (NFY).
[282] Badiou, "Althusser: Subjectivity without Subjects," 62.
[283] Amil later qualifies this claim. While he maintains that the CP needs to be in a position of leadership, he warns against potential political disasters if it does not keep itself in check (HTW, 40). Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Ḥarakat al-Taharrur al-Waṭanī: Ṭabīʾatuhā wa-Azmatuhā / حركة التحرر الوطني: طبيعتها وأزمتها," *Al-Ṭarīk: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 45, no. 3 (June 1986): 31–68.

> of class struggle, a theoretical practice of the class struggle itself. Our way to the production of our Marxist-Leninist thought is itself, then, the path of this struggle. We practice it through the leadership of our communist party, in the form that it is determined within the structure of relations of production in our colonial social formation (TKM, 15).

Amil's participation in informal, or even secret, party gatherings began in 1958 and lasted until 1963. Evelyne Hamdan clarified that his official enlisting into party-lines happened after a long waiting period, a year after his return from Algeria, in 1968.[284] Amil was attached to Algeria, but he returned to Lebanon specifically to collaborate with and serve the party. Youmna El-Eid told me that "they needed him. The party wanted him. He got educated and wanted to come back here and serve."[285] Amil's entry into the LCP was not smooth in the beginning, as the historic leadership behind the second congress wanted to protect the practical militant dimension from the possibility of sterile theoretical discussions, which could sever its relationship to the practical tasks of everyday life.[286] However, Amil's theoretical interventions did lead to some discussion, quite often in order to subdue rising altercations among party members, as Shaker hinted to me, rather than for the sake of theoretical discussion *tout court*. Amil's *Theoretical Prolegomena* therefore mostly remained unengaged. Youmna recalls that a frustrated Amil often lamented: "they are not reading me!"[287] Elias Shaker also pointed out to me Amil's preface to his *Theoretical Prolegomena*, in which he hints that they were not debating him. He noted that "you feel that there is bitterness (marāra)."[288] He stopped working on the third installment

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284 Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
285 El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
286 Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.
287 El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
288 Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.

of the *Theoretical Prolegomena*, particularly because of the war, and focused on more political writings." Youmna El-Eid further recalls:

> Mahdi said "I want to return, I want to dedicate time for it," but […] as he entered the war, he went into struggle, he entered both in practice, politically, and intellectually. He entered the struggle in the meaning of reading groups and activities with the fighters. […] He was a reference, a political reference. […] Eventually, they placed his name in the higher committee.[289]

[289] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

CHAPTER II

STRUCTURE A DOMINANTE

A. Praxis et Projet

The Algerian war was concomitant with the development of Marxist thought in the late 1950s and 1960s. Numerous Marxist philosophers, who Mahdi Amil read and engaged with, were Union National des Étudiants de France (UNEF) militants or partook in the efforts of the journals *La Pensée* and *La Nouvelle Critique*. Althusser's first contribution to *La Pensée* in 1961 was titled "Sur le jeune Marx (Questions de théorie)."[290] This article sparked debate within and outside the French Communist Party (CPF) and consequently lad to the formation of the *Reading Capital* reading group.[291] Althusser's *science* was the convergence point of a new domain of knowledge and a new theoretical activity that was free from the corrosion he saw inflicted on philosophy (by phenomenology) and politics (by Stalinism).[292] The predominant philosophical thematic in France – the problematic in the relation between the individual, the subject of praxis, and the overarching structures of history – was crippled by conflicting moral and theoretical imperatives. In contrast to the interpretation of Marxism by Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the CPF represented a heavily codified institution that was weighed down by its Stalinist

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[290] La Pensée : revue du rationalisme moderne, 1961/03 (N96)-1961/04

[291] Étienne Balibar, "'A Period of Intense Debate about Marxist Philosophy': An Interview with Étienne Balibar," *Viewpoint Magazine* (blog), March 17, 2015, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/03/17/a-period-of-intense-debate-about-marxist-philosophy-an-interview-with-etienne-balibar/.

[292] Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 141–42.

bureaucracy.[293] Sartre's proposal, as developed in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, of the transparency of will and opacity of structures, was taken to task by Althusser. Amil's first encounter with Althusser was likely through Althusser's inflammatory first article in *La Pensée*, which predated the release of *Reading Capital* and *For Marx* in 1965.

Throughout his time in Algeria, while working on his doctoral dissertation, Amil's reading itinerary stretched from Thucydides on the Peloponnesian war and the intersection of Greek thought with mythology, to Rosa Luxembourg's writings on the Russian Revolution, and the wide-ranging arsenal of works that specifically dealt with the question of underdevelopment (takhalluf) (which Amil later problematize in his first-ever contribution to al-Ṭarīq in 1968) such as the writings of Hassan Riyadh on Nasserist Egypt, Régis Debray on Che Guevara in Cuba, Samir Amin on Morocco, Bettelheim on Egypt, and later, of Fanon and others on imperialism and decolonialization. Amil was not merely concerned with history as the chronology of factual events, but more pressingly, his interest lied in the question of analyzing the critical methodology of 'practicing' history. On this question, he read more closely the works of Marx and Engels, the works of Althusser and Balibar that came out in 1965, and the economic works of Maurice Godelier, and he consulted the 'archaeological' work of Michel Foucault. Ultimately, however, he returned to reading the historical thought of Ibn Khaldūn. Amil read the critical works of Yves Lacoste, Georges Labica, and Jean Poncet on Ibn Khaldūn, and started teaching his students his own reading of the scientific account of Ibn Khaldūn's thought.[294]

[293] Dews, "Althusser, Structuralism, and the French Epistemological Tradition," 104.
[294] For a complete list of readings, please see Evelyne Hamdan's biography (HSF, 270-1n5).

In June 1967, Amil defended his dissertation titled "Praxis et projet. Essai sur la constitution de l'histoire" (Praxis and Project: An Essay on the Constitution of History) under the supervision of Henri Maldiney and the direction of Roger Arnaldez and François Dagognet. At the time of writing this thesis, Amil's dissertation was not been available in the Université de Lyon's libraries or published anywhere online or in print. Youmna El-Eid informed me that Amil did not intend on publishing it.[295] However due to its significance for the study of Amil's intellectual development, Evelyne Hamdan has been working toward its translation from the French for the purpose of its publication. She told me: "recently, I read the dissertation again, and discovered how much of his theoretical foundation it holds. It is all there. I decided it must be translated to Arabic and published."[296] Evelyne generously shared with me the table of contents of his dissertation. The body of the dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part, titled "Rupture epistemologique," is divided into section A on the philosophy of Marx's early works, including the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) and section B on Marx as the theoretician of history as read through his *The German Ideology* (1846) and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). In the second part titled "Constitution de l'histoire," he addresses the differential totality of a social structure through its mutation, as well as through class consciousness and political practice, and he analyzed in the second part's last section the specificity of "underdeveloped" countries as a 'case study.'

[295] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[296] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

Amil successfully defended his dissertation, but according to Evelyne "none of his professors properly understood his dissertation."[297] She told me: "the three professors who were on his committee did not understand the basis of it. I am not saying that they were stupid, they just did not have the right tools to understand Amil's thought. They did not understand. They gave him the doctorate, but they didn't understand him."[298] Amil faced particular scrutiny from one of his readers. Evelyne could not be at the defense as she was in Constantine working and tending to the couple's firstborn, but she recalls two of their close family friends recounting François Dagognet's harsh interjections on the subject and the framework of the dissertation (HSF, 274-5n26). When I broached the subject of Dagognet's comments in one of our interviews, Evelyne said that the memory of the exact criticism eludes her, but it concerned the overarching scope of the dissertation. The dissertation "did not suit the stage Amil was in" and it was "too grand and could have led to a book. It involved too much writing, and [it was said] that he should have done something less ambitious."[299] However, Evelyne also clearly remembers being told that Amil's rebuttal to the committee's inquests relied on Ibn Khaldūn and impressed the professors and the audience.[300] Although it was common for Dagognet to be harsh with his students, the source of his reservations are worth investigating, for Amil was heavily influenced by Bachelard's historical epistemology. This is particularly obvious in the dissertation's division – following Althusser's infamous separation – between an "early / Hegelian" Marx and a "mature / scientific" Marx. It is possible that Dagognet questioned Amil's use of the pronoun "we" in his introduction and conclusion, which Evelyne reads as

[297] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[298] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[299] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[300] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

Amil's divestment from the empty "theoretical acrobatics of academic work," and as an effort at "connecting himself, with fervor, to the study of people oppressed by colonialism" (HSF, 267).

In the conclusion of his dissertation, titled "Notes pour une recherche ultérieure: Temporalité historique des pays Arabes" (Notes for an Alternative Study: The Historical Temporality of Arab Countries), Amil articulates the dire need for a rigorous study of the temporal history of Arab countries. This was the fertile soil out of which Amil's "dialectic of temporalization of history" developed over time, transforming from a "passing temporal concept" to a "colonial relation," and eventually, to the more mature formalized system of a "colonial mode of production."

B. The Colonial Relation and Takhalluf

> "To work on a concept [...] is to confer upon it, through a regulated series of transformations, the function of a form."[301]

Amil was in the midst of an unfolding liberation project that he was compelled to frame on socialist grounds. Since he maintained that the colonial relation could not be severed without freeing the colonial social formation from its incarcerating loop of capitalist temporality, and therefore by achieving socialism, he had to hypothesize the next stage of history. There was a certain 'goal' to the historical process. His position in this moment was transformed from that expressed earlier in *Praxis et Projet*, in which he stated:

[301] This line from Georges Canguilhem served as the epigraph for every volume. Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze*, 178.

> Do not tell me that 'historical necessity' should be the source of our dreams. This 'necessity' only intervenes afterwards, not to explain, but to justify the absence of our consciousness, [which is to say] the absence of our theoretical activity from the field in which history is formed. This 'necessity' confronts us as a fate more than a necessity […] (PeP, 55).

Amil's rejection of a teleology was the rejection of the possibility of identification (tamāthul) of the colonial mode of production with the 'determinant opposite' that is the imperial MoP. However, this position precludes a certain 'necessity' of national liberation. Amil, like Althusser, linked the problems of the dominant humanist philosophy with the fallout of Stalinism. Amil's diagnosis of the "ideological" crisis of the Lebanese left, particularly of the Lebanese Communist Party, which at that point shared the humanist Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Roger Garaudy, as well as the Stalinism of Soviet Union, parallels Althusser's diagnosis of the crisis of French thought and the crisis of the French communist party. Although Amil was not in Lebanon during the years of his study, he did receive issues of the journals *al-Ṭarīq* and *al-Nidā'* in bursts during his years in Lyon and Constantine (HSF, 151). Amil decided to return to Lebanon after the Arab defeat of the six-day war in June 1967, at a time when Lebanon was going through a crisis on the level of the state (a proportional sectarian state consolidating economic politics which increased the wealth disparity) and in the left, which was struck with the failure of the Nasserist project. Amil's response was directed at a failing humanist Marxism in Lebanon, which was perpetuated by a combination of Soviet-backed orthodox Marxism as well as a Sartrean humanism. He resorted to a mode of analysis that proceeded from the elements of *fikr* (thought) and *wāqiʿ* (reality) to reformulate the capitalist relationship between colonizing and colonized countries.

Although Youmna El-Eid was not yet then a member of the LCP or al-Ṭarīq, she recalls the antagonisms and internal splitting within the left, among the Arab nationalists

and the communists, which eventually culminated in the Second Congress.[302] Amil's interventions, which were inspired by a new Marxist epistemology, aimed to generate new concepts of society and history by insisting on the vital distinction between objects of thought and real objects. This neo-Kantian gesture, which insisted that concepts were the precondition of the knowledge of any experience,[303] marked Amil's first publications. He highlighted in them the necessity of a "Kantian revolution in thought" (TP, 15). Along with this claim came his assertion that the crisis of the Arab countries (that is *takhalluf*, in its strict economic meaning [of underdevelopment], as well as cultural backwardness) was merely concerned in entertaining particularities: to see whether "the universal has really been grasped in this 'particularity.'"[304]

Although not a singular school of thought, structuralism is distinctive for its insistence on an 'all-inclusive' mode of thought whereby a unity undergirds the different variations of the structures' superficial forms. This underlying unity is what allows for common 'reading' across its different practices. Furthermore, the "erosion of obsolescent boundaries between adjacent yet seemingly independent academic disciplines"[305]gave extra breadth to the rise of this theoretical tradition. For example, El-Eid introduced structuralist concepts into her examination of the modern Arab novel and its structural transformations from the 1950s until after the Lebanese civil war. Like her friend Mahdi Amil, El-Eid wanted to diverge from the methods of Marxist literary critics who exclusively relied on "content and form and their direct relationship to society." El-Eid

[302] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[303] Mark Poster, "Althusser on History without Man," *Political Theory Political Theory* 2, no. 4 (1974): 394.
[304] Althusser, *For Marx*, 218.
[305] Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 24.

claimed that form has certain “dalālāt” (signifiers) that are exposed through reading and whereby social reality becomes the signified. El-Eid’s system brings in the concepts of “dalāla” (signification) and “ʿalāma” (sign), as well as their difference, along with the concepts of (ihāla), while posing once again the question of the “qāriʾ” (reader) as well as “al-rāwi” (narrator), “thaqāfa” (culture), “mujtamaʿ al-ḥay,” “al-zamān” (temporality), and “al-bunya” (structure).[306]

When Amil first approached al-Ṭarīq’s editorial board, headed at the time by Mohammad Dakroub, he had intended on publishing an essay under the title “al-Istiʿmār wa-l-Takhalluf” (Imperialism and Underdevelopment). The article was initially rejected for being penned in French. El-Eid recalls an antagonized Amil approaching her after the ordeal because of the reservations of the editorial board. The objections were on the basis that the paper “refers to and includes concepts that they did not approve. It was not *Marxist* Marxist.”[307] It was approved for publication after being translated into Arabic, but it was accompanied with a “tarbūsh” because it was deemed “outside of their political line” (HSF, 437). Below are the two disclaimers from the two *Isti’mar wal-Takhalluf* articles – “Part One: An Endeavor in Understanding the Colonial Relation” (1968) and “Part Two: The Colonial Mode of Production” (1969) respectively:

> al-Ṭarīq is presenting an article by Dr. Mahdi Amil “Imperialism and Underdevelopment – An Attempt in Understanding the Colonial Relation.” Dr. Amil addressed in his research a large set of intellectual and economic methodological issues in Marxism, attempting to highlight, simplify, and “modernize” them. But [he is] starting from positions that are more less congruous with the context of “the new interpretations,” which are being presented by some new “leftists” in Lebanon and are outside of Marxism. In distinguishing between the sincere motivation that propels Dr. Amil in his research and treatment of Marxist issues, and the motivations directing the new vulgarizers of Marxism, al-Ṭarīq saw it was its responsibility to present

[306] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[307] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

> Dr. Amil’s research to its readers, while at the same time indicating its disagreement with a lot of the ideas and conclusions he draws in the text, with the hopes of revisiting and discussing Dr. Mahdi Amil’s ideas in a future issue (ITM, 50).
>
> In this new and bold endeavor, Mahdi Amil raises central issues that our theoretical thought must tackle as long as we are addressing the process of revolutionary transformation in our societies. The featuring of this latest endeavor does not denote the [journal’s] complete agreement with what the researcher has reached in qualifications and conclusions. What this specifically means is that we believe in the legitimacy of raising these issues, as well as the cogency of their discussion. [We believe] in serious scientific attempts of understanding our reality within its [historical] movement, as well as the founding of our Marxian understanding of our societies and the horizons of its development. On these grounds, researchers from the editorial committee of al-Ṭarīq will discuss this study. The door for any scientific dialogue on this subject is open (ITN, 89).[308]

Youmna El-Eid recalls that Amil was offended by the forced title of “Dr.”[309] It was used to introduce the first part of the *Takhalluf* essay and once again in his article “On the Curricula of Arab Philosophy and General Philosophy” (1968) (HMF,[310] 30). Evelyne Hamdan commented on Amil’s relationship to the journal:

> The first time he wrote for al-Ṭarīq, [the editorial committee was] worried, they were afraid of this thinker and intellectual, who was not like the rest – who was ready to cross all the lines. The thoughts that [he conveyed] in the article were new thoughts. They [editorial committee] were not used to people who spoke like this. That is why they took all precautions. They slowly got used [to his thought] and the comrades soon started to feel that he had something valuable to add and wasn't just contradicting for the sake of contradicting. He had his own thought – he was bringing something new to the table, offering a new insight, important thoughts.[311]

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[308] These disclaimers are only present in the al-Ṭarīq articles and were not reproduced in the books.
[309] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[310] Mahdī ʿĀmil, “Ḥawla Manhajjay al-Falsafa al-ʿArabiyya wal-Falsafa al-ʿĀmma / حول منهجي الفلسفة العربية والفلسفة العامة,” *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīyya Siyāsīyya* 27, no. 9 (October 1968): 30–48.
[311] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

He soon after became a member of al-Tariq's editorial committee and contributed to the journal regularly (HSF, 436n29). One also cannot but mention another notorious quality attributed to the movement: the iconoclasm of its defenders.[312] Sturrock remarks: "it is an ironic fact […] that for all its arguments in favor of the systematic and impersonal, Structuralism as a movement imposed itself largely by virtue of the charismatic standing accorded both at home and abroad to a handful of French thinkers who rightly or wrongly became associated with it in the popular mind during the 1960s."[313] It is perhaps not so surprising that Amil himself will enjoy similar cult-following towards the end of his life.[314] Evelyne Hamdan stated that prior to Amil's arrival in Lebanon in 1967, his reputation of being an iconoclast preceded him: "They used to talk about him and say that he used to demolish [ykassīr] all the icons – that he did not have a red line."[315]

Al-Istiʿmār wal-Takhalluf marked a moment of transition for Amil, regarding his philosophical commitment to thinking the relationship between theoretical practice and political practice and in introducing new concepts into the Arabic language.[316] Elias Shaker recollects that Mohammad Dakroub prompted Amil to attempt to introduce new readings of concepts into Arabic, in order to avoid relapsing to French words. Shaker estimates that Amil's attempts at mastering the Arabic language led him to linguistically develop concepts that better fit his project of abolishing the old.[317] This determinate critique [Naqḍ

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312 Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 19.
313 Sturrock, 19.
314 Multiple interlocutors, that wish to remain nameless, have indicated that some of his lectures both at the Lebanese University and outside it often became overcrowded. Some of these interlocutors attended those lectures.
315 Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
316 Shaker, Elias. Interview by author. Living in France and Algeria weakened his proficiency in the Arabic language which undermined his ability to theoretically express himself.
317 Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.

/ نقض], which has its roots in contradiction [Tanāquḍ / تناقض], came to replace criticism [Naqd / نقد] in Amil's dictionary. A scientifically bound Marxism that proclaims importance for practice in the movement of national liberation necessitated a "methodological revolution" (ITM, 51). This two-part article enjoyed some momentum, but it was not as polemical as Amil's future texts.[318] Its importance lies in its setting the foundation for Amil's theoretical oeuvre. It is also the only publication in Amil's bibliography in which he refers to the theory of structuralism in a good light. This is implied in his critique of dependency and modernization theories:

> this theory is dualist, not unitary – it is not a structuralist theory, because it places two different social formations side by side instead of joining them in a historical unity. It is difficult for this theory to have a scientific trait, for it is an ideological viewpoint based on false theoretical grounds (ITN, 91).

In the introduction to the first section "On Contradiction" of his *Theoretical Prolegomena*, Amil instructs the reader to read this two-part article before starting the first chapter (OC, 29). The later editions of the book have the two-part article reproduced in the appendix to the second part of the book "On the Colonial Mode of Production."

In contrast to the theoretical texts published in al-Ṭarīq at the time, Amil's article on "takhalluf" was noticeably more challenging for the average reader to grasp in its breadth and its theoretical claims. Although Amil would continue to suffer from a lack of readership, this text prompted critics to accuse him of repeating himself and circling around the main subject (HSF, 439). Amil's ultimate aim is to insist on the significance of proper scientific (as opposed to ideological) and rational (as opposed to empiricist) inquiry

[318] Evelyne notes that Amil exercised caution in this text to avoid soliciting attacks from proponents of traditional Marxism in the LCP (HSF, 440n38). Youmna El-Eid also notes the transition character of this text represents and recognizes Amil's exercise of caution in penning it. El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

in the relation between colonialism and *takhalluf* – a relation that is “reified in consciousness”[319] – which must dispel, as its first step, assumptions based on “common sense” that is (ITM, 50). The first few pages written as preliminary remarks describe how the practice of “a sound scientific mind […] critiquing “takhalluf” is the process of overcoming it…the process of producing in Marxist thought a critique of “takhalluf” is [first] a revolutionary process [in thought] before being a theoretical one” (ITM, 54). Anticipating accusations of dogmatism against his formulation, Amil claims that the universality of Marxist thought lies precisely in its analysis of phenomena that is historically specific (and distinguished) in relation to imperial capitalism (ITM, 53). Amil justifies this claim by stating that “Marx does not address the problem of colonialism as a self-contained problem, but he addresses it tangentially as necessitated by his study of capitalism […] Marx is studying colonialism from the point of view of capitalism” (ITM, 55-6). Amil’s claim is not that capitalism and colonialism are fundamentally distinct historical processes, but that “although Marx specified the causes that necessarily promoted the colonial transformation of capitalism, he did not specify the reasons behind the necessity of the colonial development of capitalism to actually occur” (ITM, 56). In the introduction to the second installment of this article, Amil clarifies that “the necessity of theorizing the structure of ‘takhalluf’ as distinct from the capitalist structure is nothing but a logical necessity, and the necessity of reason is not the necessity of reality” (ITN, 90). For Amil, capitalism’s turn to colonialism does not represent a transformation, mutation, or

[319] Moreover, Amil critiques any applied theories addressing this “underdevelopment / repressiveness:” The applied theories are idealist and empiricist. Idealist because they assume the (Hegelian) identification of thought to reality and empiricist because it assumes the homogeneity of reality as opposed to the differentiation and specificity imposed by the inherent contradictions of its space and time (ITM, 52).

a further development in its logic, since the historical logic of capitalism inherently relies on expansion (whether through world market growth, or more violently through direct colonization). Further, the capitalist transformation of colonized countries is the result of their subsumption into capitalist time whereby a new historical logic is imposed in the place of the previous "historical process" specific to these pre-capitalist countries. Therefore, for Amil, *takhalluf* is not the historical *product* of colonization, or a pre-capitalist remnant, but a constitutive and continuously reproduced relation. In contradistinction to theories that propose the co-existence of two different modes of production within the same structure, Amil proposes that "takhalluf" (as a *society effect*) is the specific structure of colonized countries (later characterized as the colonial mode of production), which is reproduced through the social relation that mediates capitalist production and colonial production. The colonial relation creates in colonized countries a structure that is distinguished from a capitalist structure and its processual development as a result of the colonized countries' subsumption into the capitalist mode of production. Due to the dominance imposed by colonial relation, the colonial countries – albeit capitalist – do not share the same historical and economic development as the "capitalist production" and remain being "unevenly developed" (ITM, 74). Amil briefly addresses exploitation, surplus production, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, as well as Marx's separation of spheres (production, circulation, and distribution), but he emphasizes reproduction of the capitalist relation itself paying more attention to the commodity (ITM, 60). For Amil, the historical analysis of capital's processual development needs to be supplemented by the analysis of reproduction of its structure, which is fundamental for understanding the structural relation that impedes the structure of *takhalluf* of the colonial countries from developing into (or becoming) productive capitalist structures (or

'advanced' as 'imperial' capitalism). This structural analysis, Amil claims, reveals the "dialectical process" of the "contradiction between the two modes of production within a singular structural unity" (ITM, 60).

Amil recurrently stated that the relationship between 'imperial' and 'colonial' is neither reducible to 'internal' nor 'external' relations. His characterization is closer to the concept of *extimacy*: "there is no *barrier* – that is not to say *difference* – between the two" (NMS, 220). Although most of his focus in this article, and his theoretical trilogy at large, is on production, Amil clarifies "it is before anything else, the production of the relation of production" rather than commodity production, that "maintains the mode of production as colonial" (ITM, 61). The cyclicality of "takhalluf," which is sustained by the relation itself, is what gives the appearance of "feudal" remnants within the colonized social formation. Amil's structuralist analysis of this contradictory unity comes to dispel the false dichotomies of dependency theory such as 'metropole / periphery' and 'developed / developing,' 'modern / traditional or primitive,' or 'first world / third world' because these terms flatten a mode of production to its mere appearances (ITN, 92). Hence, for Amil, claims of "underdeveloped countries" trapped within a "vicious cycle" [halaqa mufarragha], require a structural analysis based on structural causality[320] as opposed to a historical analysis via mechanical causality (cause and effect) (ITN, 98). The relation between the two modes of production is not solely diachronic, but synchronic at the same time. They determine each other and are effects of one's relation on the other. This structural relation impedes the historical process of the colonized: "the severing of the colonial relation would not allow for the development of a national capitalism." The

[320] Amil attributes the concept "structural causality" to Althusser but insists on his different theorization of the concept (ITN, 98).

relation between the two modes of production is not 'external' but 'internal' to each of them – he refers to it as "totalisation-différenciation," or a process of totalization through differentiation (ITN, 97). This term first appears in Amil's dissertation: "We forget that totality for Marx is not homogenous, it is a complex whole, wherein the structure within is created from several levels. The [processual] movement of the totality forms within a "différenciation" movement more than one that is "unificatrice". For more clarity, we say that it is a "différenciation totalisatrice" and a "totalisation différenciatrice." We also forget that time for Marx is not a "continuité homogénéisatrice," which dissolves differences and distinctions in an idealist, if not imaginary, unity" (PeP, 54).

Amil transforms *takhalluf* from a positive attribute of "underdevelopment" in economics and "regression" in thought to a formal category that is at once the trait of the structural relation between capitalist and colonial countries and, at the same time, a structural determination that conditions *epistemological obstacle*s in the way of scientific practice. Elsewhere, Amil specifies a programmatic approach to national liberation by pragmatic means:

> *The process of producing our thought cannot be done in the framework of modern epistemology* [as do intellectuals and communists in France, England, or Italy], as in, *the process of thinking that makes of our theoretical practice of various natural sciences or mathematics its object. This impossibility is not a matter of principles, but is a practical impossibility. It finds its conditions in the movement of class struggle in our society.*
> […]
> [Scientific thought] cannot take place in the production of a theory of practice or in theoretical practices for different sciences, but it must necessarily lie in *producing a theory of the colonial relation* (TKM, 22-3, Emphasis Amil's).

C. Contradiction

Mahdi Amil's *Theoretical Prolegomena*, which is made up of two volumes: *On Contradiction* and *On The Colonial Mode of Production*, was written in the context of heightening political protests in 1960s Lebanon and transformations within the LCP. Following its Second Congress in 1968, the problematic of the party shifted from a Sovietistic one to one revolving around national liberation, and in particular, the liberation of Palestine. The two sections of Amil's Theoretical Prolegomena were finished in 1971 and 1972 and published separately in 1973 and 1976 respectively (HSF, 441 & 463n40). Amil's project transformed from a one concerned with theorizing history to a project on the specificity of colonization, which then gained the colors of its final form in the theorization of the scientific tools of theoretical practice concerned with national liberation. Amil begins his mature work by claiming that the CMoP is an ongoing contingent contradiction within the unity of the global capitalism. Following the renewed spirit of militancy after 1967, Amil diagnoses the contradiction within postcolonial societies such as Algeria, Lebanon, and Egypt as one that begets a particular form of nationalist political practice, but that cannot be resisted through nationalism or de-colonial practices. The site of struggle of the national liberation movement had to be anti-colonial and anti-capitalist at once, hence the necessity for a socialist thought to be theorized in relation to the universals of capital but which was to be distinguished from the *wāqiʿ* (reality) of colonized countries. In the preface to the third edition of the book (1985), Amil lists the two operations central to his project:

1- The process of producing scientific knowledge on:
   i. The mechanism of colonial development of capitalism in our Arab societies.
   ii. The mechanism of class struggle specific to this development, or, the development of this historically distinguished form of capitalism, in which it is the mechanism of national liberation.

2- The process of producing the [scientific] tools to produce this knowledge. (TP, 13).

1. Verbindung, Structural Causality

Amil's project began as a negation of the vulgarization of Marxist theory – what became of it "through vandalization and deviation in the practices of the Arab communist movement, or some of its parties" by "qawmiyya [nationalist] ideology" (TP, 11-2). In order to offer this critique, Amil read Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, Althusser, and Poulantzas in order to create a revolutionary thought that is distinguished by the "cohesiveness of its internal structure, strictness of its logic and concept deduction, and organized in a coherent system of concepts" (TP, 12). Amil also invoked Kant in his investigation of the conditions of possibility of a differential theory of a mode of production. Amil's claim that CMoP countries could not secede from the colonial relation without a rupture from the capitalist relation entailed a theory of political practice that had to include a theory of a revolutionary transition. The Althusserian theory of structural causality provided the possibility of non-linear transformation. Coupled with the axiom of 'great law of uneven development' driven by contradiction – the "motor of all development" – it provided for Amil a possibility for an alternative social formation.[321] Amil justifies his rejection of the Hegelian concepts of totality and teleology, hence justifying the formation of a CMoP's through the

[321] Althusser's formulation of unevenness and contradiction is as follows: "The specific difference of Marxist contradiction is its 'unevenness' or 'overdetermination,' which reflects in it its conditions of existence, that is, the specific structure of unevenness (in dominance) of the ever-pre-given complex whole which is its existence. Thus understood, contradiction is the motor of all development. Displacement and condensation, with their basis in its overdetermination, explain by their dominance the phases (non-antagonistic, antagonistic and explosive) which constitute the existence of the complex process, that is, 'of the development of things'." Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, Radical Thinkers (London ; New York: Verso, 2005), 217.

invocation – following in the footsteps of Althusser's reading of Lenin[322] – of Marxism-Leninism's universalization of the law of uneven development. The difference between Hegelian totality and Marxist universality, Amil says, lies in

> the relationship of parts to the whole [which] in the first is a relationship proceeds in the track of subsumption because of the absence of [an understanding of] uneven development. While the second is a relationship of differentiation, as in specification, since the process of the whole here, that is the process of universalization, is not but the process of the uneven development of this whole itself (TKM, 12).

Amil's emphasis of the importance of *ikhtilāf* [difference] – through extending his critique against totalization – comes at the expense of the dismissal of the whole of Hegelian idealism.[323] Thus, Amil rejects the "early" Marx's use in the EPM (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts) of the term *tarkīb* (synthesis) in favor of *tamāzuj* (combinaison; verbindung in Capital) (ITN, 104-5). The following table depicts Amil's reading of the differences between a Hegelian and Marxian contradiction based on the first section of the fourth chapter from *On Contradiction* (OC, 71-2) and the conclusion of chapter four from his 1974 book (AHA, 110-5):

	Hegelian	Marxian
Dialectical parts	Tarafān Mutamāthalān (parts in identification), al-dud (opposite)	Naqīḍayn (determinant contraries)
Type of Relation	Non-antagonistic: Tamāthulī (identification)	Antagonistic: Tanāqudi (antinomic determinant opposition)
Process	Negation: (rafḍ, nafī), Determinate Negation (nafyī, rafḍan dā'iman)	Contradiction (Tanāquḍ)

[322] Althusser, 210–16.
[323] Amil's pits Hegelian idealism in sharp distinction to contradiction, claiming elsewhere: "Contradiction cannot be rationalized through [Hegel's] logic, but in the logic of contradiction alone, which is in thought, the logic of materialism." Mahdi Amil, "Reason between the Logic of Idealist [Identification] and the Logic of Contradiction" in (MES, 13).

Condition (ما يحدد طرفي التناقض)	Originary irreducible identification, negation of unevenness	Originary irreducible difference, due to uneven development
Outcome for parts	Remain in identification with themselves	Transformation of the contrary opposite
Outcome for antagonism	Vanishing of the antagonism during its process	Transformation of the oppositional contrary through the movement of struggle
Resolved	Abstractly, in thought	Historically, in reality
Effect on social formation	Tarkīb (synthesis), Tarākubī (Superpositional)	Tamāzujī (Combinatory)
Knowledge effect	Intibāthī (centrifugal)	Insihārī (centripetal)
Totality	Shumūliyya (Unitary Whole)	Kawniyya (Universality)
Type	Shaklī, haykalī (Formalistic)	Taḥwīl, taghyīr (Transformative)
Logic (of)	Capitalism, ruling class, state	Objective historical necessity, the party of the revolutionary working class
'Partisan' position	Bourgeoisie	Revolutionary class

The structuralist Althusserian reading of Marx – along with its nonlinear, empirical, or mechanistic theory of causality – was essential for Amil in arguing for the specificity of his CMoP. It nonetheless made theorizing transition difficult in its focus on structural relations as opposed to historical conditions. Put differently, Amil wanted to theorize the countours of (historical) transition and not structural reproduction. Amil's solution introduces two forms of unevenness: a *structural unevenness* (tafāwut bunyawī) (which informs the contradiction of the social formation via a force of domination) and a *developmental unevenness* (tafāwut tatawwurī) (which informs the contradiction of the processual force of history via a relationship of determination). Amil thereby locates the structure wherein "[t]here is always one primary contradiction as well as secondary contradictions, but their roles are exchanged in the structure that is articulated in dominance which remains

stable"[324] in the processual force of history. Amil formalizes these contradictions on a two-axis coordinate system:

1- Vertical (raʾīsī, principal) dominant contradiction (tanāquḍ muṣayṭir) of the "social formation" (al-bunya al-ijtimāʿiyya).
2- Horizontal (asāsī, principle) determinant contradiction (tanāquḍ muhadid) of the "processual movement of history" (al-ṣayrūra al-tarīkhiyya).
3- Secondary contradictions (thānawiyya) which occupy the two sides of the dominant contradiction and represent the relations of hegemony (haymana) in the class alliances of the revolutionary pole and the counter-revolutionary pole.

2. Determinant Contradiction, Dominant Contradiction, Secondary Contradictions

Amil's account on contradiction not only dispels what he deemed as idealist Hegelian or teleological accounts of mechanistic history by emphasizing the role of structures in the place of linearity, but it also sets off to critique a structuralist understanding of history. Amil emphasizes the codependence of historical (diachronic) analysis and structural (synchronic) analysis (HKY, 78-80). Amil insists that the economic contradiction is fixed, yet absent (present only in its effects)[325] – as opposed to being an aspect of the principal or secondary contradictions – in order to argue that there is a dialectical relation between structure and history. The economic contradiction determines the unitary frame of the social formation, while the dominant contradiction breaks this frame in order to enable the social formation to transition. Amil locates a shortcoming in

[324] Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," 201–1.
[325] Amil compares the determinant contradiction to the Freudian unconscious "it only exists in its effects and is absent from the structure" (HKY, 84).

Mao and Althusser in their failure to distinguish between the historically-specific *relations of determination* and *relations of domination* existing within social formations. Amil therefore dismisses the Althusserian analysis of a mode of production for its inability to think transition and for being bound by a logic of reproduction. For Amil, the historical force of class struggle is crucial to thinking the question of transition, revolutionary rupture, and leaps in the CMoP. He designates the determinant contradiction (historical process) the contradiction of forces and relations of production which *determines* the structural framework of the social formation. In other words, the determinant contradiction is the economic contradiction determining the mode of production of the social formation (capitalist, feudal…etc.). Amil designates the dominant contradiction of the social formation the political contradiction. It is characterized by multiple aspects (*maẓāhir*) (the political, economic, ideological aspects). Class struggle comes to crystalize this contradiction in a relationship of domination in order to break the structural framework of the determinant contradiction preventing transition. Class struggle occupies the nodal position at the intersection of the *determinant contradiction* of forces and relations of history (historical process), the *dominant contradiction* of the political (social formation), and the *secondary contradictions* (class alliances of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces). Amil's main goal is to argue for the specificity of the class struggle in the CMoP: its conditions are determined by the economic contradiction, class struggle is tasked with fusing the economic and ideological aspects into a political contradiction that must become dominant, and in order for class struggle to catalyze the dominant contradiction, the revolutionary forces must cause a change in class alliances (secondary contradictions).

Amil's critique of Althusser signals his fundamental disagreement with Althusser and Poulantzas specifically, and with "structuralism" more broadly. Amil sees the political contradiction as the primary contradiction in a social formation, which is tasked with the transformation of the structure and its movement in the process of history by means of class struggle. Whereas the economic contradiction is the determinant contradiction in history, despite its appearance as an "aspect" (in the Maoist sense) in the primary or "dominant" political contradiction, it is not dominant (it determines the MoP but cannot change it). Amil critiques Althusser's theory for enabling a substitution of (primary and secondary) contradictions which presupposes that an "ideological contradiction could be considered a primary (dominant) contradiction" as well as Poulantzas' assertion that the economic contradiction could be, in a capitalist social formation, a "dominant contradiction as well as a determinant contradiction" (OC, 94).[326]

Although both Althusser and Amil begin from the same theoretical position – that Marxist theory and practice can accommodate unevenness, not only in the external interaction of various social formations (in Amil's system, the "determinant" historical or economic contradiction), but also internally in the relation of the social totality to itself (in Amil's system, the "dominant" structural or political contradiction)[327] – they arrive to opposing conclusions. Althusser rejects the erection of all "hierarch[ies] of instances once for all [which] assign each its essence and role and defines the universal meaning of their relations" in favor of recognizing that the "necessity of the process lies in an exchange of roles 'according to circumstances'."[328] For Althusser, any attempt that "identifies eternally

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[326] Amil footnotes Althusser's Pour Marx, éd. Maspéro and Poulantzas' Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales, éd. Maspero p.12, 18, 26, 31. (OC, 94n1-2).
[327] Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," 212–13.
[328] Althusser, 213.

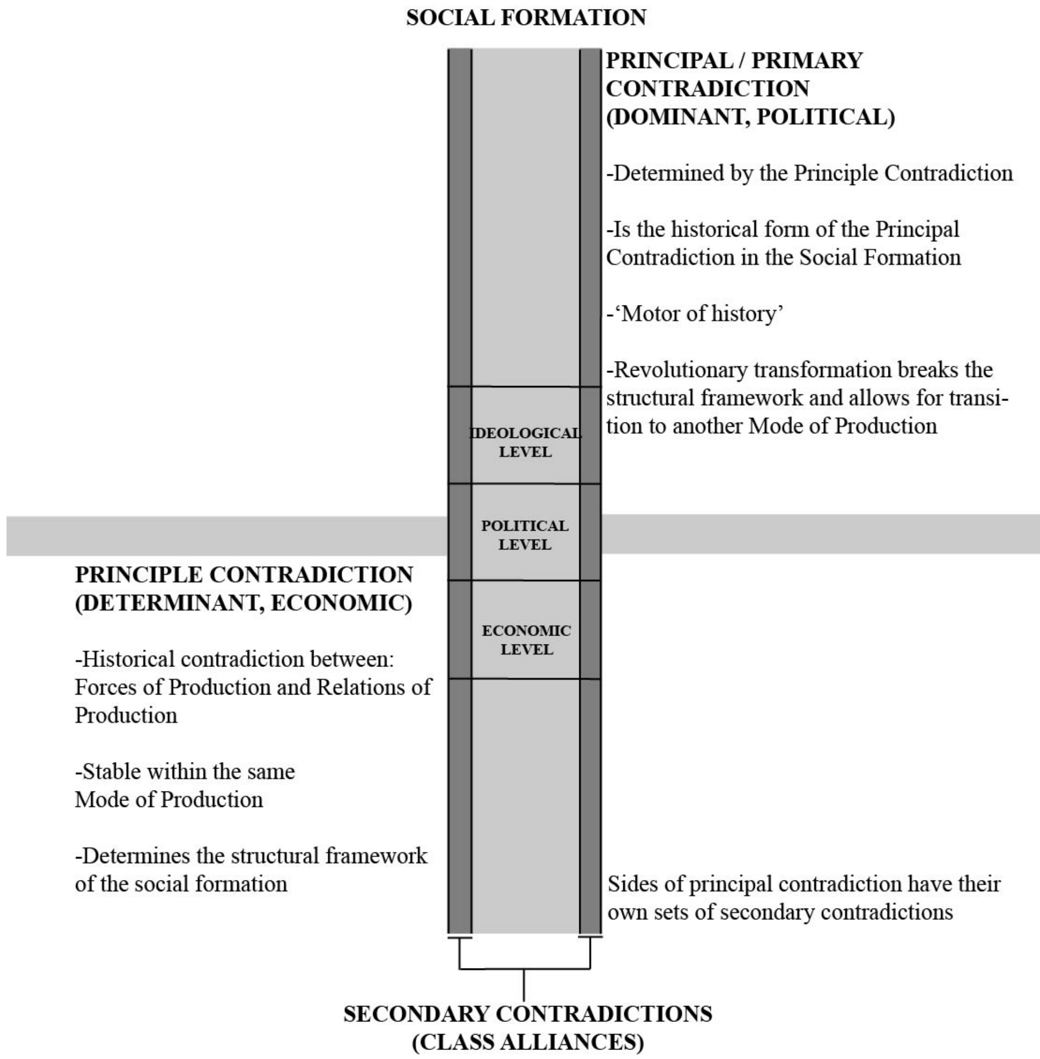
in advance the determinant contradiction-in-the-last-instance with the role of the dominant contradiction, which forever assimilates such and such an 'aspect' (forces of production, economy, practice) to the principal role, and such and such another 'aspect' (relations of production, politics, ideology, theory) to the secondary role"[329] is economistic. By contrast, in Amil's system, both the relations of the "determinant" contradiction and "dominant" contradiction are tied to the economic and the political, respectively, but their forms change. The economic contradiction changes with the transition from one mode of production to another, whereas the political contradiction carries within it aspects, levels, and secondary contradictions of its own. Amil rejects Althusser's axiom that "in real history determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised precisely in the permutations of the principal role between the economy, politics, theory, etc."[330] on the grounds that it is economistic, but also because Amil insists on the distinctness of each of the relations of domination and the relations of determination. Amil proceeds:

> the relationship of domination is different than the relationship of determination between contradictions. It is not theoretically valid to place the former (political, domination) in the latter (economic, determination) – as in Althusser's works – or else the role of class struggle disappears. Without a conception of political struggle between classes in the formation of history, an understanding of revolutions, or structural leaps, becomes impossible (HKY, 83).

Ironically, Amil's system falls squarely within the Althusserian definition of economism. On the other hand, Amil accuses Althusser of economism on the grounds of the latter's inflated emphasis on the economy. However, Amil takes his critique of Althusser further by extending its "danger" to the whole of structuralist Marxism: "this is where the danger of structuralism lies in understanding history (HKY, 83-4)." The difference between both

[329] Althusser, 213.
[330] Althusser, 213.

accounts lies in Amil's dispelling of a mechanistic analysis of history and his insistence that the economic only appears through its effects and never in its elements, thereby justifying its relegation to the fixed 'long durée' contradiction of historical force and its mere manifestations as "levels" and "appearances" in the primary dominant political contradiction (HKY, 88-90). Although Amil never formalized his system of contradictions, a possible rendering could resemble the following figure:[331]



[331] Please note that this formalization corresponds to his theory of contradiction from his *Theoretical Prolegomena* and his 1970 article *Ḥawla Kitāb "al-Yasār al-Ḥaqīqī wa-l-Yasār al-Mughāmir"* (HKY). His formulation changes in his later writings during the war. One particular intriguing example is his avowal of a central Althusserian point that he critiqued for "reifying" structure, namely the multiplicity of temporalities in a historical whole (political, economic, ideological, aesthetic…).

3. Centrifugal, Centripetal, Superposition, Fusion

The central point of contention between Amil and Althusser resides in their different readings of Mao's famous text "*On Contradiction*." Althusser quotes Mao to assert that "[…] at every stage in the development of a process, there is only one principal contradiction which plays the leading role" which during political practice "exchange their roles in the structure articulated in dominance while this latter [secondary contradiction] remains stable."[332] In Althusser's reading of contradiction, there are two contradictions (one primary and one secondary), whose aspects (political, economic, theoretical, ideological, forces of production, relations of production) are not fixed and are contingently allocated to either one of these contradictions. For Amil, by contrast, there are two "principal" contradictions which fall on an x-y axis: a horizontal determinant contradiction (the economic contradiction of history) and a vertical dominant contradiction (the political contradiction of the social formation). These two contradictions do not exchange roles or aspects. Instead, it is only the vertical contradiction that has different aspects (political, economic, ideological) and secondary contradictions (one for each of the revolutionary class and the ruling bourgeoisie). Whereas in the Althusserian (and by extension, Maoist) scheme, the "principal contradiction produced by displacement only becomes 'decisive', explosive, by condensation (by 'fusion') [… it] is the latter that constitutes the 'weakest link' […] which occupies the strategic nodal position that must be attacked in order to produce 'the dissolution of (the existing) unity.'"[333] By contrast, Amil takes up the Althusserian reading of Lenin's "weakest link"[334] and of the mutations in the

[332] Althusser, *For Marx*, 210–11.
[333] Althusser, 210–11.
[334] Althusser, 211.

structure which Althusser borrowed from psychoanalysis – displacement, condensation, and fusion – and translates them using terms from Engels.[335] Amil refers to displacement as *haraka intibāthiyya* (centrifugal motion), which is characterized as an "ectopic motion or displacement from its center." It highlights relations of production, "in their effects which are generated from the rest of levels of structure." In other words, "class struggle seldom appears in the true form of political struggle. It is decentered from its political structural level because it appears, instead, in its primary appearance as an ideological or economic struggle" (OC, 50). This happens as a result of the dominance of the political practice of the counter-revolutionary class alliance, whereas the domination of the political practice of the revolutionary class alliance would result in the opposite movement: condensation. Amil translates this concept as *haraka inṣihāriyya* (centripetal motion) where this *al-tarābut al-inṣihāri* (fusion) forcefully pulls the "the rest of the social formation's contradictions into the center of the political contradiction, as a primary contradiction" (OC, 51). In other words, "class struggle, in this revolutionary moment, appears in its true form as a political struggle – it moves, not in its primary form solely, but in its various social forms, on one structural level" (OC, 51). Amil refers to the configuration of the levels of the social formation in displacement as *al-shakl* al-*tarākubi* [superpositional form], and the fusion of other levels into the political during condensation as *al-shakl al-insihāri* [fusion form].

[335] One of the early Marxist books Amil read during his formative years in Beirut, Engels describes in *Anti-Dühring,* Marx's materialist conception of history as one of "two great discoveries." For Engels, modern materialism describes history as a "process of evolution" tasked with discovering its own "laws of motion." Friedrich Engels, "Anti-Dühring, Herr Euden Dühring's Revolution in Science," in *MECW*, vol. 25, 50 vols., Marx Engels Collected Works (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 1–309.

In Amil's schema, the fusion (through centripetal force) is not directly linked to a unitary secondary contradiction, and therefore, does not necessarily imply the dissolution of the primary contradiction upon the condensation of this secondary contradiction. Amil blames this weakness in Mao (and by extension, Althusser) on the lack of distinction between the *aspects* of the primary contradiction and the secondary contradiction, which is itself due to "the absence of the theoretical distinction between the *structural unevenness* (vertical [or dominant] contradiction) and the *developmental unevenness* (horizontal [or determinant] contradiction)" (HKY, 89).[336] Further, Amil reads a second weakness in the Maoist-Althusserian system's failure in recognizing a distinction between the two sides of the secondary contradiction that the class alliances occupy:

> the form of the relation of domination of the [uneven] development [of the primary / political contradiction] – the relation of domination that connects it with the rest of the structural contradictions – varies with the difference of the dominant class aspect that is determinant of its dominant presence, and therefore, with the difference of its dominant side (OC, 194).

Amil is arguing that the dominant class (whether the ruling class or the proletariat) is overdetermined by the economic contradiction. Political practice, therefore, varies not only in the dynamic of this contradiction but also in other contradictions, depending on the dominant class or side of the primary contradiction (OC, 194) Ultimately, Amil's problem with Althusser is in the latter's account of ideology, which cannot accommodate the differential crystallization of secondary contradictions of determinant oppositional classes:

> Here lies Althusser's error, when he considers the revolutionary communist party to be like the other parties of ruling classes. He does not consider class specificity, and therefore the theoretical difference between the ruling class and other parties. It

[336] It is worth noting that Amil's use of *vertical* (ʿāmūdi) and *horizontal* (ufuqi) to refer to contradictions is rare and is mostly limited to his HKY book review article as well as the TP.

> is this structuralist tendency that prevents him from seeing the relation of difference between the antagonistic classes in the Marxist contradiction […] (OC, 77n1).[337]

Amil reads Althusser's claims in the "*Ideological State Apparatus*" essay as limited to theorizing the reproduction of a mode of production instead of its rupture, as well as Althusser's theory of the co-existence of multiple temporalities within a single formation (each pertaining to the ideological, economic, and political).[338] On this point, it is essential to recall that Amil's own definition of structural causality is different from that of Althusser. Amil's theory of *structural causality* is of different MoP overdetermining one another, not of different "temporalities" overdetermining one another (ITN, 98n8). Amil's own reworking of Althusser – in his propositions of structural levels instead of temporalities, and domination instead of structural causality – is the source of his own confusion. This later resulted in the Amil's claim regarding structuralism's inability of understanding different temporalities (FTT, 61-5).

4. Temporalities of Structure

In attempting to think the moment of rupture from the temporality of reproduction of the CMoP, Amil theorizes three different non-sequential temporalities of structure: the *temporality of formation* (zamān al-takawwun), the *temporality of progression* (zamān al-

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[337] The rest of the footnote: "[…] and therefore, the relation of objective difference in the interconnection of the levels of the structure in the social formation between the points of view of the antagonistic classes. This mistake, in its different branches, goes back to its basis in misunderstanding the theoretical status specific to the political contradiction in the social formation. Refer to the article: Les Appareils Idéologiques d'Etat. La Pensée No 151 juin 1970" (OC, 77n1).

[338] In his later writings, Amil avows this very Althusserian argument in relation to the Lebanese Civil War.

tatawwur), and the *temporality of rupture* (zamān al-qat').[339] The first temporality marks the transition of the structure from one mode of production to another. In the case of the CMoP, it is the violent colonial encounter that 'subsumes' the historical process of the colonized to become part of capitalist totality. The second temporality is the circular logic of time whereby the structure reproduces itself by reproducing its relations of production, further displacing (or decentering) the political contradictions. Finally, the third temporality accounts for the yet-to-be-realized radical rupture, or *coupure*, that allows for the breaking of social formation's (determined) frame. It is in this third temporality that the political contradictions are crystalized through condensation, leading to a 'fusion' of contradictions, which results in an explosion that breaks the structural framework of the primary contradiction and allows for the transition of the structure into another mode of production (OC, 47-9). Amil's understanding of contradiction here adopts the Althusserian reading of Maoist contradictions but is based on Amil's own definition of structural causality. For Amil, the *temporality of reproduction*, as characterized by the dislocation of the political (in Amil's terms: centrifugal force), is the time of *non-antagonism*. On the other hand, the *temporality of rupture*, which is characterized by the condensation of the political (in Amil's terms: centripetal force), is the time of increased *antagonism*, which leads to an explosion characterized as "the moment of unstable global condensation inducing the dissolution and resolution of the whole, that is, a global restructuring of the whole on a qualitatively new basis."[340]

[339] In his *On the Periodization of History* manuscript, Amil revises the second and third temporality and names them *temporality of reproduction* (zamān al-tajaddud) and *temporality of transformation* (zamān al-taḥawwul) (FTT, 38-9).
[340] Althusser, *For Marx*, 216.

D. The Colonial Mode of Production

Amil's penultimate claim is that the CMoP is a capitalist MoP, but one that has a historically and structurally determinant form (a *society effect*) that was necessarily reproduced as part of the unity of capitalist contradictions. In addition to an impeded history that is caught within a looping temporality of reproduction, the CMoP has a distinct class formation that is different from a non-colonized social formation. In contrasting the colonial bourgeoisie (local bourgeoisie that emerged through colonization) from the imperial bourgeoisie (Euro-American bourgeoisie), Amil writes: "the specificity of the Arab bourgeoisie compared to the European bourgeoisie lies in the origins of [the colonial bourgeoisie's] historical formation which determines the nature of its class historical process […] This class was primarily formed in light of the colonial relation of servitude […] which generated new and distinct relations of production that are different from the capitalist relations of production that we find in European countries" (CMP, 320). The chief trait of the classes in a CMoP is the *la-tafāruq tabaqī* (non-differentiated class structure or "classe de indifférenciation") and *istibdāl tabaqī* (class substitution or "substitution de classe"). These two traits thwart the possibility of 'successful' revolutions. Amil claims that a revolution against the imperial bourgeoisie would result in that class to be substituted by the colonial bourgeoisie – a transformation Amil referred to as "dependent non-independence to a 'dependent independence'" (ITN, 120). The "middle class" also acts as a replacement for the colonial bourgeoise and can occupy a position of hegemony, yet neither the colonial bourgeoisie nor the "middle class" can transform into a "national bourgeoisie" which remains a "class fantasy" (CMP, 391-2). Due to these distinct traits, Amil claims that national liberation can only be carried out by the working

class. But national liberation constitutes only one of the three revolutions (which must be carried out as one revolution) which the working class must bring forth:

> [T]he distinguished form of the presence of the universal law in the colonial social formation is for the working class to undertake – due to distinguishing the logic of colonial production – *three revolution*s which are in fact *one revolution*: Bourgeois revolution, national revolution, and socialist revolution. In the first revolution, the working class must accomplish what the [colonial] bourgeoisie failed to do; the radical destruction of the different pre-capitalist relations of production and to accomplish the process of capital accumulation in the form that enables it to be what it is impossible to be, as in to actually be a capitalist bourgeoisie. This impotence is not a negative class quality as much as it is the objective character specific to the colonial relations of production. And the working class must accomplish, in the second revolution, what the traditional as well as the renewed colonial bourgeoisie failed to do, that is national liberation that severs the structural servitude[341] to the imperialist structure. This impotence is also not demonstrative of the logic of colonial production but is part of its internal necessity. In the third revolution, the working class must accomplish its historical class task, that is specific to it alone and not other social classes, as in undertaking of transitioning to a socialist mode of production (CMP, 444-5).

I will not delve further into the characteristics of the CMoP.[342] This remainder of this section will be dedicated to the feedback, or rather lack thereof, that the *Theoretical Prolegomena* received. The second installment of the *Theoretical Prolegomena* (On the Colonial Mode of Production) was the text that Amil's theoretical writings on the MoP debate was mostly known for. It was also the text that (relatively) received the most amount of engagement. The exclusion of the first installment from the majority (if not of all) feedback and criticism was a source of distress for Amil. The problem was not in the disproportionality in critique (between the two), but that the critique (if it ever came), was based on what Amil had diametrically opposed himself from in the first installment.

[341] It is worth noting that Amil uses the word "tabaʿiyya" [servitude] when referring to the Hegelian Master / Slave dialectic [jadaliyyat al-sayyid wal-tābiʿ] (AHA, 174).
[342] I intended to investigate Amil's CMoP and its transformation with time, as well as positing it against similar theories, however the political unrest in Lebanon prevented me from pursuing this part of the study.

Excluding the pleads for feedback in the 'Takhalluf' essays, every introduction and preface of the two published sections of the *Theoretical Prolegomena* ended with a request for feedback and critique. Amil concluded the preface of the first edition (July 1973) of *On Contradiction* with the following words:

> Individual research is a labor of artifice [ḥirafī][343] which contemporary scientific thought has surpassed. And since I practiced this research in an [artificial] form, it is because of several objective conditions forced me to. The process of thinking must take place in its natural and necessary way, therefore the criticism of the reader, of what he will find to be a theoretical adventurism, in this research is fundamental for its continuation. So perhaps to undertake this critique is itself a contribution in the development of the joint research (OC, 29-30).

Yet, the criticism never came. I believe this lack of feedback and criticism (to the OC) is what drove him to publish the second installment in 1976 before finalizing the third part. At the time of publishing the second installment (CMP), Amil began its introduction (dated 6 July 1975) with the following words: "Is there a need to write an additional introduction for this second part, despite having written one for the first?" He then proceeds to justify the partitioning of the two sections, before returning to the subject of reading:

> I said [to myself] I will begin, then the critique ought to come. Negation or doubt or dismantlement or deepening. Or even if not that, a theoretical workshop would begin where the individual would return to his natural size and discover his limits. Only to encounter others in a work of research where [the research] interconnects and contradicts [itself]. Therefore, it becomes complemented through a social form that is its scientific form. But the critique never came. What did come was a silence that I do not know – or maybe I do know – how to interpret. Therefore, the work remained [artificial]. And within this adventurism, I still am waiting for what shall necessarily come, as a form of criticism, that is not silence, of which thought is always deprived of in its approximation of a distinguished reality that resists [يعانده] it or fails [يعاجزه] it. Criticism never came, what came were its scattered echoes which I gathered (CMP, 297-8) […] Did our research succeed in becoming what it

343 Perhaps the word "ḥirafī" comes from the direct translation of the French word "artificien" to represent a work of craft that necessarily includes a cunning use of deviation from the norm.

> wanted, a historical materialist ABCs within the national liberation movement? It is up to the reader to say: this is what I am still waiting to read. And [the reader] must point me to the place of failure and to the place of success in this ongoing research (CMP, 301).

In 1978, the two parts were published together in the same book. In 1980, five years into the civil war and well after Amil set the third volume (*On the Periodization of History*) aside, the third edition of the *Theoretical Prolegomena* was published. The third edition featured a third introduction (dated August 1980) made up of two parts. In the first part Amil reminded the readers of the centrality of a materialist science of history that maintains the universality of reason and emphasized the centrality of science for the unfolding political stakes by quoting the renowned Leninist dictum: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." In the second part of this third introduction, he addresses his work, explains the concepts he employed, reminds the reader of the third part that was still a work in progress, and addresses some of his critics. By this point, Amil's theoretical works received some attention, albeit disproportionally – feedback on CMoP far outweighed the feedback on OC:

> The funny thing is that the first part was much less fortunate with regard to feedback than the second, despite the fact that the latter's theoretical structure relies on the former and can only be comprehended through the former. The theory of contradiction is what governs my theoretical works in their entirety. Only through [understanding the theory of contradiction] can critique begin, if it sought to be fruitful. And such critique remains sterile if it sufficed itself by observing the outcome without the starting points, for [such a reading] severs it from its grounds and fails to see the movement within which it was generated (TP, 15).

Amil admits that his first task (production of scientific knowledge of capitalist development and of class struggle specific to the colonial form) was often outweighed by his second task (the production of the scientific tools enabling the scientific production of the former knowledge) (TP, 13). Amil blames this discrepancy for engendering the

“ambivalence” in some of the readers, which was expressed in various forms: “such as accusing me of abstraction, or that the language I write is difficult and often formalistic, and that I establish strict deductive relations between concepts within a stern logical structure that does not reflect empirical reality, with all the details and richness of this reality, but a pale reflection, or that I do not place weight on history and the sequence of events within it[…]” (TP, 14). Despite all of Amil’s attempts at emphasizing the centrality of Marxist-Leninist historical materialist concepts for the national liberation movement, the reader “questioned the validity of the work, or its usefulness, when [the reader] could not find social reality present, in its blood and bones, in the work” (CMP, 299). Evelyne Hamdan, Youmna El-Eid, and Elias Shaker all conveyed the extent of Amil’s discontent and frustration. Amil was a thinker engaging with the question of the colonial relation and the “unevenness” of capitalism at the time. His work critiquing the theory of “takhalluf” and ‘dependency theories’ of the colonial relation was written at a time when the works of Samir Amin, Paul Baran, and Paul Sweezy were already well-established and celebrated. Although having never explicitly addressed, cited, or engaged with any of these leading theorists at the time, Amil was well-aware of their work.[344] According to Evelyne Hamdan, Amil read a large amount of Amin’s books and both of Amil and Amin frequented each other’s events in Beirut but did not have a personal relationship outside of these events.[345] Youmna El-Eid mentioned that despite certain similarities, Amin’s work had “more clarity because it was more empirical, whereas Mahdi never approached economics. He had major

[344] According to Evelyne Hamdan’s biography of Amil, he read Baran Sweezy’s *La capitalisme monopolistique* (Paris, Maspero, 1968) and Paul Baran’s *Economie politique de la croissance* (Paris, Maspero, 1967) (HSF, 468-9n60).
[345] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

criticisms. Mahdi's work was theoretical and focused on the relation politically."[346] El-Eid added: "Amil used to criticize how they spoke about 'takhalluf' […] each worked on a different register, they met in their starting points and goals, but not in their research, not in their "tarīq" [path]."[347] Indeed, even with the journal al-Ṭarīq, Elias Shaker commented: "In general, there were no debates with him. At least, [Amil] considered that they were not debating him by name, as in directly. He expressed this in different ways, in his writings. You should see the prefaces and the introductions. There were hints that they were not debating him. You feel that there is bitterness."[348]

E. The Periodization of History

The first part (*On Contradiction*) was written during the years 1969-1971 (OC, 213), the second part (*On the CMoP*) was finalized in the summer of 1972 (CMP, 447), and the Lenin chapter,[349] the final chapter of the first part, was written and finalized in July 1973 (CMP, 447). Amil stopped working on the third volume (*On the Periodization of History*) after deciding to publish the second part in November 1976. There have been different interpretations regarding the fate of this book: some saw it as an admission of failure or a giving up, due to his disavowal of the question of History for Structure finally catching up with him. Other, more generous commentators attributed the outbreak of the

[346] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[347] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[348] Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.
[349] In the following section, I will argue that the Lenin supplement to *On Contradiction* – which comes after the final chapter of the first part and before the first chapter of the second part – is of tremendous importance. This gesture (or 'dash' as I will call it, borrowing from Rebecca Comay's and Frank Ruda's reading of Hegel's *dash* between his two authoritative books) functions as a 'minus sign' which frames how the second (and the third part) ought to be read.

war, which demanded more 'concrete' political militancy and theoretical engagement with 'particulars,' as the determinant factor. On the one hand, Amil's writings after 1975 did assume a more pressing character, such as the 1979 book *Al-Naẓarīyya fī al-Mumārasa al-Siyāsīyya: Baḥth fī Asbāb al-Ḥarb al-Ahlīyya Fī Lubnān* where Amil published a book socio-historical analysis of the causes of the civil war, with an introduction on the relation between *theoretical practice* and *political practice*. Another example is the 1980 book *Madkhal Ila Naqḍ al-Fikr al- Ṭaʾifī: al-Qaḍiyya al-Falastīniyya fī Aydiyūlūjiyāt al-Burjuwaziyya al-Lubnāniyya* on Michel Chiha, sectarianism, and the dominant ideology of the right. That is not to mention his two 1985 books on Edward Said and Ibn Khaldūn, respectively, as well as the countless articles Amil and conferences published in al-Ṭarīq. However, in all of these works, and particularly in the debates organized by al-Ṭarīq, Amil employs his theoretical system and defends it. Amil did not stop working on the third part in 1975 due to the war, he stopped as early as 1973. I believe that the war was not the main factor behind his halting of his theoretical writings. In fact, Amil published the second installment in November 1976, a year into the outbreak of the civil war.

El-Eid said "I don't think he stopped only because of the war, but also because this required a lot of work, and research. He was stuck."[350] All three of my main interlocutors expressed, in one way or another, that the third part "is not a book you can rely on." However, the book does not advance any outlandish claims that are uncharacteristic of his other writings. In this book, among other things, he shifts his focus to critiquing Althusser and Balibar. He accuses Althusser (and Structuralism) of the same crimes he once charged his (and Althusser's) Hegel in the past:

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[350] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

> Althusser’s temporal structure is singular, because temporality [for him], whether the temporality of transition or formation, or reproduction, is necessarily the temporality of structure, as in the temporality of a structure of production in a particular MoP. […] [For Althusser] every MoP has one temporality, the temporality of its structure [the temporality of its reproduction] (FTT, 63-4). […] The concept of synchronicity through which [Balibar] thinks the temporality of reproduction of this structure prevented him from seeing the necessary coexistence that is determinant of the social formation in its distinctness of its material historical existence. Consequently, this prevented him from distinguishing between the concept of MoP and the concept of social formation. Therefore, it prevented him from analyzing the actual historical movement of this distinguished structure as the analysis of the movement of the social formation from the that of the MoP (FTT, 60).

The unfinished manuscript, totaling around 68 pages, was in published 2001 through the collective effort of the *Société des Amis de Hassan Hamdan / Mahdi Amil* in a modified manuscript form as an effort of continuing Amil’s ‘theoretical workshop’ (HSF, 275n27). After the assassination, the pages of the manuscript were shown to El-Eid, who was already familiar with them. She opposed the idea of the manuscript being published as is. They invited Faisal Darraj to intervene by writing an introductory chapter and an epilogue, respectively titled “Mahdi Amil and the Concept of History” (Mahdi Amil wa Mafhūm al-Tarīkh) and “Illumination” (idāʾa). Youmna El-Eid partitioned the book into sections, gave section titles – while making sure to adhere to Amil’s language, as she also did for Naqḍ al-Fikr al-Yawmī – and wrote a preface titled “Clarification” (Tawḍīḥ).[351]

El-Eid’s clarificatory preamble gets very close at the problem of *Fī Tamarḥul al-Tarīkh*: “Amil clearly points, first, to that he did not write his study as parts, but as a research open to what its internal logic and epistemological necessities warrant. It also informs us, second, that his research lead him to ‘discover new fields’ that he was not ‘aware of the necessity of its discovery,’ and that ‘the logic of the study’ subjects the

[351] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

‘theoretical activity to its objectivity’” (El-Eid, FTT, 8). El-Eid adds: “This is how Mahdi Amil partitioned the first part, then the second, from his study that is based on a singular context, feeling a sort of resentment whose source is not his own self, but in realizing that the third section of his study would lengthen and be delayed due to what will be uncovered of the logic of the study from necessities that require the exploration of further fields, as in examination and reading, and thinking through the complications of reality” (El-Eid, FTT, 8-9). Amil writes in the introduction to *On the CMoP*:

> I had finished the first section - except for the eighth chapter of it - in the summer of 1971. I sectioned it and sent it for publications for reasons I have indicated to the reader. They are the same reasons that are now inviting me to section another section to be published under the title “On the Colonial Mode of Production.” This section has been ready for printing since the summer of 1972. I have not published it until today, thinking that the study would have ended. It lacks only a conclusion in which I can extract what was present in the premises of the research itself. Where I return from the end to the beginning in a movement that does not close but only opens another horizon of research that is more in the field of historical and political practice than in the field of theoretical practice. But the objective development of research into the mechanism of the national liberation movement - and this is the primary subject of the whole study - followed a different logic, its logic that forced me to enter a third section that I am still writing. I had to divide what was ready to be the second section of the study. And this study is one in its three parts (CMP, 297-8).

Youmna El-Eid’s remarks are astute, not only because they convey the tension that Amil himself conveyed in 1975, but because it points to a radically different way of perceiving the structure of the trilogy: 1) Amil’s ‘third part’ is not, and was never, really the final installment of a trilogy. 2) Amil’s ‘abandonment’ of *Tamarḥul* is not simply reducible to Amil setting it on the side, but quite paradoxically is the very gesture of Amil starting this ‘third’ – the synthesis of the triad / trilogy. In other words, the ‘synthesis’ is not in writing the concluding third installment but is the very gesture of setting it aside. This statement does not mean redacting *Tamarḥul* from the trilogy, but that the third (as

Amil himself admitted) ought to be considered the continuation of the second. Far from proposing any fundamentally different claims, *Tamarḥul* merely takes the arguments raised in *On the CMoP* to their logical conclusions. In fact, the very first sentence of *Tamarḥul* refers to the last sentence from the second: “We must stop at this last issue to address any ambiguity that could possibly arise around it” (FTT, 31). This does not only mean that *Tamarḥul* would not make sense without *On the CMoP* but that the latter is not complete without the former. His trilogy is, as he had proclaimed, not a closed study but one that bifurcates, changes and might lead to unexpected or unplanned places. To read the *Tamarḥul* manuscript as the “synthesis” (as a simple negation) would be to miss the point of Amil’s precise undertaking. The third does not offer anything new. Third part is not third, it is only continuation of the second. Its thesis is already that of the CMoP. And more importantly, the discordance, the failure, the shortcoming, of the third is precisely that of the second. As such, the deadlock of the third is the deadlock of the second. And Amil faced this deadlock precisely when he took his arguments to their logical conclusions. Not only would considering the third volume to be the continuation of the second important to recognize the ever present shifting of definitions, due to its internal contradictions, but it makes Amil’s next gesture all the more important. Amil’s definition of the CMoP does not only change throughout the course of his theoretical works, but even in the second part – he redefines the CMoP from being its own differential mode of production to being a colonial form of the capitalist mode of production. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that those oversights were not weaknesses for Amil, but they attested to the transformation and development of his ‘theoretical workshop.’ Amil ends the (July 1975) introduction to the second installment (On the CMoP) not by demarcating it against his other attempts at

drawing the CMoP, but by precisely blurring the lines and recognizing the deadlocks by adding previous failed attempts:

> One final word before I conclude this introduction: I appended this second part of the study with two articles titled "*al-Istiʿmār wal-Takhalluf*" published in al-Ṭarīq in the 8th issue of 1968 and the firth issue of 1969, respectively. They are beginnings, without through which the general movement of thought does become clear. I have also attached in this second part another article published in al-Ṭarīq in the 9th issue of 1972 titled "On the History of the Socialist Movement in Egypt." This article, like the others, is an indivisible part of this study, it could almost be one of its chapters. There is nothing strange in this for the national liberation movement is the subject of thought in all of what I write. Perhaps it might be best for the reader to begin by reading these three articles, for if done, he could continue the movement of the study through the development of its internal logic. Therefore, I saw it necessary not to change one letter from these articles, although there are many ideas that must be reconsidered. In light of the results reached by the research itself, it will recover what was previously mentioned and correct it and overtake it in the line that the research drew in its beginnings (CMP, 301).

F. Repeating (Lenin): The Limits of Theoretical Practice

The chapter on Lenin, itself written and added in 1973 – at the same time Amil paused his work on *Tamarḥul* – is what I believe constitutes the missing 'third part.' If *Tamarḥul* ought to be periodized not as the 'third part' but a continuation of the second, and if there a was 'third' which does represent a point of transformation, then where is this elusive 'synthesis'? In a way, the 'third' is present in its absence – the writing of the supplemental Lenin chapter came in at the time of the failure of its constitution of *Tamarḥul* as 'its own' part and as the 'conclusion' of the study on national liberation. In this sense, the 'synthesis' of the Lenin chapter, far from being the closure or resolution of the theoretical practice, is its transformation to a new form of theoretical practice (that of direct intervention in party politics and theoretical discourse around the party). The chapter on Lenin, titled *Specificity and Universality in Marxism-Leninism*, is a doubly Leninist intervention (in the text itself, as well as, beyond it) but of a singular nature (the deadlocks

of the text must be resolved outside it, through party political practice). The first intervention, a retroactive intervention, was the placing of the Lenin text after *On Contradiction*, but before *On the CMoP* – as in not only invoking the 'Leninist' law of universality and difference to justify his leap into proposing a differential MoP which nothing in Marxist theory justifies it, but is also an affirmation that this singular act is what embodies the universality of the truth of Marxism. This gesture is Hegelian par excellence: if the invocation of Lenin signifies the recognition of an epistemological deadlock (failure of finalizing the *CMoP* and *Tamarḥul*), then it is in another way, a negation of the negation. And quite surprisingly, in a truly Hegelian fashion, he places this text before the *CMoP*, as though he is maintaining that negativity precedes negation. The second intervention proceeds from Amil repeating Lenin's own deadlock (how to start a socialist revolution in a pre-industrial, 'quasi-capitalist' society?): a radically singular act of leaping into party politics. Amil's sole mistake was his insistence that this deadlock was in fact an epistemological one. As such, he decides to proceed with a "Kantian revolution." Perhaps, his very failure of attaining this epistemological demystification attests to his proximity of recognizing this deadlock and reevaluating his position.

Amil's article on Lenin which was added 'in the last instance,'[352] as the eighth and final chapter (but not quite acting as the conclusion) to *On Contradiction*, also served as the cut-off point before the *On the Colonial Mode of Production*. It acts precisely as the *dash* embodied that is present at the end of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic*:

> In supplying a retrospective commentary on its own method, it points beyond its own terminus, opening to a sequel that will suspend the framework of the original

[352] Curiously, this article on Lenin was written after Amil had finished writing the second installment, as well as the first few sections of the third installment, which succeed it.

> book. The dash in this way functions simultaneously as a minus sign and an underlining: it interrupts, subtracts, and cancels out the project of phenomenology even while emphasizing the latter's most fundamental claims.[353]

Also, similarly to Hegel's own two books, it is difficult to determine the difference between the two installments. Rather than thinking of *On Contradiction* as the place where Amil first constructs the objective logical structure of the colonial formation and the *On the CMoP* as the "subjective" supplement before his engagement with the historical framework for the processual movement of history, any attempt to reduce the relationship between the two simply fails.[354]

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[353] Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash: The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, Short Circuits (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: MIT Press, 2018), 54.
[354] Interestingly, the title of the first chapter of the first book is "The Relation of Thought to Reality" and the title of the first chapter of the second is "From the Relation of Thought to Reality to the Relation of Thought to Thought."

CHAPTER III

READING HISTORY TWICE

> With pedagogical interest I write this research. I wanted it to be experimental, an exercise in reading a traditional text through materialist thought (IFK).

A. Mahdi Amil's Ibn Khaldūn and the Question of Second Readings[355]

Readings are never innocent. And the crimes that they commit do not lie in what is asserted or openly confessed, but rather precisely in what is repressed or disavowed. However, as is common with the interminable labor of repression, symptoms are bound to slip through, revealing a truth residing behind what is proclaimed to be the "powerful and compromising passion."[356] Just as Louis Althusser, and later, Mahdi Amil, read Marx against himself to reveal the unconscious structure governing the latter's text – science of history in the former and the colonial relation in the latter – to read Amil against himself results in a fruitful insight on the historical contingency of his time. It is not the aim of this paper to produce an elaborate philosophical account such as those aforementioned projects in which Amil's Ibn Khaldūn is shown to be the 'true' Ibn Khaldūn. Instead, this paper will limit itself to a short analysis of an essay by Mahdi Amil, which will set out to read his essay against itself and other writings in order to reveal a *problematic*. To theorize the absent causes in Amil's social theory, we must begin from a starting point – in other

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[355] A version of this chapter was presented at the Arab Council for the Social Sciences.

[356] While denouncing any proximity Althusser and his circle had to structuralism, he proclaims "we were Spinozists." Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: NLB, 1976), 132.

words, our symptom: Ibn Khaldūn. Despite Amil's high regard for Ibn Khaldūn throughout his theoretical development in Lyon and Constantine, it must be noted that his essay does not provide a textbook reading of Ibn Khaldūn, but rather, presents Amil's own Ibn Khaldūn. Amil not only taught Ibn Khaldūn to his students in Constantine, Saida, and Beirut, but also relied on his thought in his doctoral defense upon being harshly critiqued by one of his dissertation committee readers (HSF, 274-5n26). Despite all the biographical accounts that indicate Ibn Khaldūn's overdetermination over Amil's thought, he is mentioned only once in the first edition preface of Amil's theoretical magnum opus *Theoretical Prolegomena to the Study of the Influence of Socialist Thought on the National Liberation Movement*:

> I do not hide from the reader that I followed in my approach that of Ibn Khaldūn in his Muqaddima, and I was within my method pursuing in his method, and I was a Marxist, and I did not find this to be a contradiction. It was complementary, so I understood that the path of Marxist-Leninist thought is the path appropriating our historical social reality in its heritage and present. Ibn Khaldūn was the first to understand that history is subject to objective laws governing its process, and that the science of history finds its basis and the possibility of its formation in the existence of this objectivity. Therefore, I understood the lesson and necessarily saw myself walking in the line of Marxist-Leninist thought, for reason in history is the material basis of the science of history itself.

Throughout his life, Amil struggled to garner a serious readership for his theoretical writings, due to their theoretical density as well as their militant anti-orthodoxy. Amil's indebtedness and free appropriation of concepts from Gaston Bachelard, Althusser, and Nicos Poulantzas instigated controversies within leftist circles. Despite all of his attempts at repudiating such designations, whether by appealing to Marxism-Leninism or by insisting on the historical dimension of his work, his work struggled to attract the critical intercourse he deemed necessary for the advancement of his thesis. Amil was assassinated in 1987 before returning to work on the third and final installment of his *Theoretical*

Prolegomena, after more than a 10-year hiatus due to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the subsequent challenges in synthesizing the "historical" question, which was central to the book's thesis. The third installment titled *On the Periodization of History* was edited by Faisal Darraj and Youmna El-Eid and published posthumously in 2001.[357] It is peculiar then that Amil decided to publish his essay on Ibn Khaldūn's account of history, precisely during his own crisis, at around the same time of the publication of his book on Edward Said's *Orientalism*,[358] ten years into the civil war. Speaking to Evelyne Hamdan about the peculiarity of the book, she described Khaldūn's spectral influence on Amil as an "obsession" (hājiz) that imminently (much like Spinoza's God) appeared through its effects: "Since we were in university and got married, travelled to Algeria, and returned to Lebanon. Always. Ibn Khaldūn has been present in his speech. Everyone who knew him in that period, and if you ask them, they would say that Amil for sure spoke, or mentioned, Ibn Khaldūn. So, Ibn Khaldūn lived him with for a while."[359] What lies beyond a surface reading of *On the Scientificity of [Ibn] Khaldūn's Thought*?

B. The (Historical) Materialism of Ibn Khaldūn

In his 1985 book on Ibn Khaldūn's scientific methodology, Amil rereads Ibn Khaldūn's "*Muqaddima"* through a materialist lens. Through a process of a symptomatic reading – reading one text against itself or another to derive a third one – Amil read Ibn Khaldūn's science of historiography through Marx's 'scientific' historical materialism, in order to flesh out the scientific materialist elements of Ibn Khaldūn's writings on history

[357] ʿĀmil, *في تمرحل التاريخ*.
[358] ʿĀmil, *Hal al-Qalb lil-Sharq wa-l-ʿaql lil-Gharb?: Marx fī Istishrāq Edward Said / هل القلب للشرق و العقل للغرب؟: ماركس في إستشراق إدوارد سعيد*.
[359] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

and the science of history (ʿilm al-tārīkh). In doing so, Amil presents a materialist conception of Arab thought and history, dating back to Ibn Khaldūn's epoch, which distinguishes Ibn Khaldūn's science of historiography from the historiography that preceded him. The essay investigates the relationship between history and *ʿumrān*, and the necessary transformation of historiography from a proto-religious structure of narrative to a scientific one that is capable of grasping history. Amil argues that it is only through the utilization of *ʿumrān* in its scientific bases, that history becomes a science. This return to Ibn Khaldūn is deliberate not only in its recognition of the scientific achievements of a 14th century Arab thinker, but in redefining the political import and relevance of the study of history through the appropriate tools for Amil's present. Yet, the merit of his essay does not lie in a positive emphasis on Ibn Khaldun's scientificity. Unsurprisingly, the reading to which Ibn Khaldūn was subjected produced the exact same concepts that were central, if not foundational, for Amil's own existing body of work. In this benign and self-regarding gesture lies a truly profound claim to the universality of reason.

In his symptomatic reading, Amil is careful not to rush in characterizing Ibn Khaldun's work as historical materialist or as proto-enlightenment. Amil notes in various parts of this book that despite the absence of an "economic" component that is typically considered foundational for the application of a Marxian critique of political economy – namely the question of a *mode of production* which was the principle framework in Amil's own oeuvre – Ibn Khaldūn's theoretical structure remains robust due to its internal cohesiveness (al-tarābut al-dākhilī) (IFK, 22). In fact, for Amil, the absence of this materialist concept can only reaffirm the materialist basis of Ibn Khaldun's work – in other words, that his account was pre-modernist and therefore predated capitalism (IFK, 71). Amil's symptomatic reading did not aim to superimpose Marxist thought on Ibn Khaldūn's

thought, with the takeaway being that Khaldun was not – surprise, surprise! – a Marxist thinker before the advent of Marxian thought. Rather, Amil maintained that any reading of a text is governed by a certain theoretical position. A reading is never independent of its own theoretical basis – the theoretical basis always reflects the theoretical structure of its respective material conditions. What Amil shows through Ibn Khaldūn is that thought does not escape history – it is intimately tied to its historical moment and is only differentiated through the processual movement of history. Therefore, the relativization of thought is only possible through its temporalization in a scientifically derived universal relation.

In emphasizing the importance of thought in its relation to its historically variable, and ultimately material, theoretical activity, Amil contended that what effectively made Ibn Khaldūn's thought materialist was its *lack* of an understanding of the economic. If political-economic thought was a condition of the formation, and the subsequent domination, of a specific mode of production, then Ibn Khaldūn's thought cannot produce the theoretical knowledge necessary to deal with different, more advanced, social formations (IFK, 76-7). The materialism of Ibn Khaldūn's work does not lie in its difference from Marxist thought, but in the difference of its own historical material conditions from that of Marx's times. It is the structural difference in thought and knowledge that enabled it to be materialist – it is "true" to its own historically-specific epoch. It is only through the theoretical distance between a critical Marxist position and that of the thought of Khaldūn – due to the mode of critique that the former could only present at a later historical period – that the scientificity of the latter could be recognized (IFK, 82).

C. History qua History

Amil extrapolates into Ibn Khaldūn's epoch two concepts of historiography. The first limits its inquiry to the appearance of history, where historical reality is taken to be identical to its empirical reality appearance. Historical inquiry that was limited to empirical practices, as was common in Ibn Khaldūn's time, prevented the possibility of the formation of Ibn Khaldūn's historiography as a science because it was at the end of its epistemological limits. (IFK, 10-2). In this version of history, chronicled events were not necessarily interconnected through their relation to a certain scientific principle, but instead, just followed from one another. History was one method of passing wisdom from the past to the present through moral lessons – it was chronicled either for religious and political organization or for the sake of pleasure [mutʿa] or entertainment [tasliyya] (IFK, 10). Ibn Khaldūn rejected the scientific conditions of this tradition of knowledge production because of its failure to explain events with a 'scientific' understanding of causality. Without the presence of a scientific objective, a clearly defined object of study, historical practice could only develop as a narrative tool. For Amil, writing and sharing history for the sake of disseminating information or for chronicling events, is based on an understanding of historical reality that is limited to its appearance as substantiated by a witness – which renders it counter-revolutionary (IFK, 12). This system of historiography shared the core premise of religious thought by continually referring to its originator – through going up its chain of transmission – to reemphasize the authority of its originary source. This process of repetitive reproduction of news does not involve validation of the content of what is being transmitted but is only restricted to the investigation of the source of the transmitter (IFK, 10).

Such a historiography that was limited to understanding history solely as a tool for theological ends was bound to relaying information through a chronology of events (IFK, 42-5). Historiography was primarily concerned with two directions: the first was investigating the study of the prophet's "ḥadīth" or "sunna" as well as his biography, and the second was the publicization of the exploits as well as the genealogy of tribes (IFK, 44-5). The process of validation of this work was strictly through attribution (isnād), where this news was investigated solely by traveling up the chain of its transmittance back to its origin (IFK, 45-6). For Amil, this process of validation does not qualify as scientific, as it neither explains these events, nor contributes to a production of knowledge, but only seeks to affirm them based on attributing them to the discourse of elites (IFK, 45). This empirical understanding results in the flattening of history by the reaffirmation of "an organic relation between news, event, and human action" (IFK, 45). For Amil, this was characteristic of an "Islamic method of investigating time," as the consequential or chronological movement of history was based on mechanistic causality (IFK, 50). The predecessors of Ibn Khaldūn only worked on an empirically-based reality and did not approach their subjects of inquiry by constructing them theoretically, or, by producing theoretical knowledge on those subjects. Ibn Khaldūn's critique is not premised on the method of validation of this historical work, but on the non-scientific structure that these historians were working within (IFK, 50). This structure of thought that governed Arabic thought, according to Amil, was what prevented the formation of a science of history because it relied on an empirical structure of thought (IFK, 50). For Amil, it was empirical precisely because it was religious since its empirical nature was based on religious thought (IFK, 51). Amil adds, "The historian is not allowed to be anything but two things: either the narrator transmitting this news, or a theologian, transmitting the thought of God

through his analysis" (IFK, 51). Amil stresses that the object of science is never pre-given and freely accessible in the field of empirical observation or empirical reality. The object of science is strictly theoretical and is built upon a complex structure that is concurrently the yield of its own process of formation as a science (IFK, 42).[360]

The second concept of history that Amil illuminates is one whose analysis penetrates mere appearance to seek the rational kernel in search of the truth of history. Amil claims this understanding of history was the subject of science in Ibn Khaldūn's far-reaching critique of narrative historiography. For Amil's Ibn Khaldūn, historical reality was not a form of incidental reality like for the chroniclers. Ibn Khaldūn's science dictated the critical investigation of a seemingly-incidental appearance to attain the reality that resided at its core (IFK, 12). This process of critique sought to actively excavate reality from an appearance that concealed it. Amil explains that for Ibn Khaldūn to be able to undertake such a process, he had to apply the appropriate theoretical tools by first producing a system of scientific concepts. For Amil, this was the task that Ibn Khaldūn undertook in his Muqaddima. Only by studying the determinant conditions of historical reality, through producing a science of history that scientifically grounds social reality, can historiography commence. This crucial understanding of the structure of reality, when taken as the object of knowledge, would in turn enable its own comprehension (IFK, 10-2). In other words, Ibn Khaldūn's intervention was regarded by Amil as establishment of a science of the conditions of reality, rather than outlining methods for its mere description. This transformation of the definition of history from its pre-scientific form (narration of news based on the appearance of social events) to its scientific one (understanding the facts

[360] It is worth noting that Amil repeats this account on the conditions of experience in Mahdi \`Amil, *Hal al-qalb lil-Sharq wa-al-ʻaql lil-Gharb? Marx fī istishrāq Edward Said*, 85-6.

at the core of reality that condition the events) was for Amil the main subject and theoretical apparatus of the Ibn Khaldūn's Muqaddima. The difference that the Muqaddima created was in its redefining of what the object of history ought to be: The first version of historiography restricted its object of historical inquiry to events, and therefore sufficed itself with the chronological or narrative-based method of investigation. However, Ibn Khaldūn's object of historical inquiry was reality, not mere events. Therefore, his science necessarily resisted narration since reality cannot be reduced to events. For Amil, reality is a complex structure – constituted by relations of interconnected events – which in the course of its historical movement gives birth to events (IFK, 12). Therefore, a science of history demands the travel from the level of events to their origins or causes – which in this version, are the relations themselves and thus not accessible through empirical observation. Since the object of this science of history, is no longer the event itself but the underlying conditions, scientific inquiry demands theoretical engagement (IFK, 12). In Amil's own words: "The historical reality that the historian addresses through a scientific process is not the event in news-form as knowledge production, but it is - if it is possible to say - a total social phenomenon that is interconnected with a historical reality which appears in the form of an event" (IFK, 13). This treatment would color the event with the conditions of its real existence, like the formation of a nation or the eruption of a revolution (IFK, 13). Scientific historical practice is the exploration of reality through its materialist foundations. An event cannot be, therefore, abstracted from the soil it is based in or the conditions that control the movement of history (IFK, 13).

The 'science of history' that Amil delimited in his reading of Ibn Khaldūn was one which needed to be able to grasp the fundamental unfolding contradictions governing the

internal logic of historical moments. For Amil, it was this materialist theorization of a historical moment – what ultimately is the task of historical materialism – that was required to define the mode of politics that needed to be set in place for national liberation. While reading many concepts from the Marxian critique of political economy, Structuralism, and French historical epistemology into Ibn Khaldūn (such as science of history, identity and contradiction, epistemological break, non-mechanistic causality), Amil also built on Ibn Khaldūn's materialist understanding of a science of history to tackle the issues of periodization and the transition of modes of production. Yet Amil's return to Ibn Khaldūn to think the question of transition seems peculiar in the first place. Amil is well aware of Marx's famous formulation, "the human anatomy contains the key to the anatomy of the ape,"[361] – which indicates that previous stages of development could only be understood from the viewpoint of future development – and has used it elsewhere. Amil's penultimate claim, in one way or another, relies on this very axiom. Amil's study of Ibn Khaldūn's historiography is therefore not a plea to return to Ibn Khaldūn's formulation, but is in fact, the registering of a demarcation line between the science of Ibn Khaldūn and that of his predecessors. Amil's doubly Bachelardian gesture here, is at once reading an "epistemological rupture" into Ibn Khaldūn and then espousing another universal law: the non-reversibility of scientific achievement. The echoes of this reading are not only concerned with Amil's own study of capitalism in colonized society or geared towards the theoretical practice of this science but are in many ways an ideology critique targeted at the dispellers of a then-depleted Marxism. Therefore, it is important to locate Amil's second reading in relation to the shifting contexts of "Soviet," "Western," and

[361] Karl Marx, "Grundrisse," in *MECW*, vol. 28, 50 vols., Marx Engels Collected Works (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 42.

"Arab" Marxism contemporaneous to his time, as well as in relation to a modern 'historical consciousness' trying to define itself. In other words, in order for Amil to set in motion the mechanisms for national liberation by way of a declared "methodological revolution," the claim is that one does not need to look anywhere outside of the developments of historical materialist thought. The contours of this thought will be presented below through Amil's very own Ibn Khaldūn.

D. The Scientific Revolution in Social and Historical Thought

> "The history of the sciences will then appear as the most irreversible of all histories. In discovering the true, the man of science bars the way to an irrationality. Irrationalism can no doubt spring up elsewhere. But from now on there are forbidden routes. The history of the sciences is the history of the defeats of irrationalism. But the fight is without end…"[362]

Amil's reading of Ibn Khaldūn's revolution in social and historical thought is centered around several concepts or "themes" – conveyed both implicitly and explicitly throughout this essay – which were in fact omnipresent throughout Amil's entire oeuvre and militant practices. These "themes" will be presented through Amil's reading of the thought of Ibn Khaldūn and located against Amil's own historical and theoretical positions. They expound Amil's chief response to the three currents he critiqued in *Naqḍ al-Fikr al-Yawmī*: 1- nihilistic thought (tayyār al-fikr al-ʿadamī), 2- obscurant thought (tayyār al-fikr al-ẓalāmī), and 3- bourgeois Islamist thought (tayyār al-burjwāzī al-mutaʾaslim) (NFY). At the risk of repeating myself – unparadoxically, something that characterizes Amil's

[362] Gaston Bachelard, *L'activité rationaliste de la physique contemporaine*, 1st ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), 27.

notorious style of writing – I will outline and expound on these critical concepts. This time, however, they will be broken down and listed schematically as points. It must be noted that they do not appear as logically separate in Amil's book. The aim behind this repetition is the production of something "new," – new, not in the sense of innovation or discovery, but in terms of divulging a truth that had always already been there. This step is necessary for engaging with Amil's *problematic*, in its particular situatedness (in both thought and historical context), also has other aims: 1- to showcase Amil's reformulation of his own central concepts as he read them through Ibn Khaldūn's terms. 2- to highlight the meticulousness of Amil's labor of symptomatic reading. And 3- to set the stage for my main argument, which is yet to be revealed to the reader.

According to Amil's reading, the materialist merit of Ibn Khaldūn's thought is based on following scientific concepts: 1- critique of empiricism and religious thought, 2- [structural] causality, 3- synthesis of the social and historical [relations], 4- difference and contradiction, 5- relationship of thought to historical reality, 6- the universal and the specific, 7- transformation of structure of thought, 8- epistemological break.

1. Critique of empiricism and religious thought

For Amil, it is the scientific mind that looks into human sociality as an object of science "for itself, and due to its nature[363] [of thought]," independently of the concepts that precede it (IFK, 32). In supporting this claim, Amil referenced Ibn Khaldūn's study of the relation of religion in ʿ*asabiyya* and its consequent effects on the state. For Ibn Khaldūn, the return to the reign of the exterior, the creator, in the study of human sociality was what

[363] By nature, Ibn Khaldūn means necessity.

secretly hardened the hegemony of religious thought. The subsumption of *ʿumrān* risked transforming its scientific logic into a religious one, and consequently, disrupting the conditions of possibility of science (IFK, 32). Ibn Khaldūn, according to Amil, affirmed that the theological field should remain detached from that of *ʿumrān* to the extent that neither field should attempt to read the other. For Amil, the kernel of scientific objectivism lies in the investigation into an object of knowledge for the benefit of the science rather than the object for itself – the latter risks deriving "wisdom, […] or moral lessons" (IFK, 36). Therefore, *ʿumrān* was designed to proceed by avoiding taking discursive positions from reality, and instead, affirming a position of scientific knowledge as means and ends in themselves (IFK, 36). This form of 'independence' did not conceal *ʿumrān's* relationship with history that it had to maintain, since the science of *ʿumrān* was ultimately the base of knowledge of the science of history – wherein this history is the material movement of *ʿumrān* (IFK, 37).[364] Since religious thought proceeded by looking into all givens – and their interconnections under the principle of an externality, their creator, whereby this religious thought eternally reconstitutes the human as the creation of this creator – thought was bound to its creator as it was distinguished because of him and through him (IFK, 31). Consequently, Amil argues, that if an historian were to look through this theological lens – through the relation of creator and creations – the logic of causality would be ascribed to

[364] Amil clarifies: "[…] this movement is, precisely, the materialist form for the existence of the laws of *ʿumrān*. Therefore, it is necessary to look into *ʿumrān* for itself (and that way, the science of *ʿumrān* is formed as an autonomous science), to be able to historicize it. Because historiography, in as much as it is a science, is the history of this *ʿumrān*, that in its process for itself is an object of an autonomous science, becomes the object of a science of history. […] The primary knowledge condition for the process of sociality is the object of a science that stands for itself, that is the investigation of where it lies, as in its internal laws, and its necessary historical process, of the objective laws that are not related to the religious rules or "fiqh" principles, or ethics, or wisdom. It is something independent of the preceding thought" (IFK, 37-38).

the will of this creator (IFK, 25). Under these conditions, a search for science, and even a "history," is untenable. Worse, still, the process of searching for historical causes would suddenly find itself as a branch of religious jurisprudence or theological metaphysics (IFK, 25). Religious thought would then risk, not just be the replacement of scientific history with religious thought, but this religious thought would set the parameters of historical practice (IFK, 25). Amil claims that in contradistinction to these conditions, Ibn Khaldūn liberated the science of human sociality, *ʿumrān*, and the science of history from their relationship with an external being.

The echoes of the political conjuncture of the 'sectarian' civil war in Lebanon is gleaned in this critique. Amil is not simply falsifying or limiting religion's ability to address social reality and transform it, instead his materialist reading through Ibn Khaldūn addresses a two-fold problematic: on one level, he relocates religion from its essentialization as a transcendental or independent power back to the realm of consciousness. In this sense, religion is brought down from the heavens to the soil it sprouts out from: morality, religion, and metaphysics (as forms of consciousness) are not independent – they have no history and development outside of the development of the material intercourse and production of man. It is only through material production that thought, and the products of thought, are shaped. To repeat Marx's famous materialist inversion: "It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness."[365] On another level, it is only through properly attributing consciousness to production can one understand the development of man and be able to transform history. Historical materialism as a science of history can only proceed from the premise of

[365] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology," in *MECW*, vol. 5, 50 vols., Marx Engels Collected Works (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010/[1845-7]), 36-7.

sensuous productive activity if the idealist and empiricist history is relegated to forms of ideological representations of material conditions. Amil is echoing Marx here: "It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and fixity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts, as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists. Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science, the expounding of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men."[366]

2. [Structural] causality

Amil's critique of religious and empiricist thought in historiography is premised on the rejection of mechanical and expressive theories of causality. For Amil, an empiricist mode of studying history is based on *mechanical causality* which proceeds by understanding the effect of one element on another in a successive manner. On the other hand, a theological mode of analysis that relegates change to a superior external object is based on *expressive causality* which describes the effect of the whole on its parts, whereby the effect is an expression of whole's own essence. Althusser's symptomatic reading of Marx's use of the *Darstellung*[367] as a *theatre without an author* read a new theory of causality, structural causality, into Marx. Structural causality theorizes the relations between elements as internal to, but not immanent expressions of, the whole. This complex

[366] Marx and Engels, 36–37.
[367] Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. David Fernbach and Ben Brewster (London ; New York: Verso, the imprint of New Left Books, 2015), 28.

organization of the relations determines the interrelationship of elements within the whole, thereby making the causes of the structure absent and only present in the structure's effects. Amil reads structural causality into Ibn Khaldūn's science in contradistinction to the ones Ibn Khaldūn critiqued – where the events follow from each other based on appearance without a guiding principle, and often because of external relations acting on them. Causality for Amil is not merely an event but is the law of social movement of social reality (IFK, 17). These laws of motion, however, follow the primitive law of unevenness and therefore develop unevenly. It is these laws of social movement that condition, through their internal logic of contradiction, the historical necessity of social development. The marriage of contingency and necessity informs the logic of contradiction that governs the development of human sociality as well as historical development.

3. Synthesis of the social and historical (relations)

Amil proclaims Ibn Khaldūn's synthesis of sociality and history to be a scientific leap (qafza) from the 'science' of his predecessors (IFK, 30) to the newfound science of *ʿumrān*, which involves a process of determining a subject of history through the investigation of the causes behind social phenomena. The causes of these social phenomena are the laws that govern human sociality in their historical reality and in their historical movement (IFK, 20). A study of history is rendered impossible without the study of human sociality, and the inverse is equally correct. If historiography is tasked with historicizing the process of human sociality, then it is not tasked with capturing the story of events (since sociality is not made up of events), but it is tasked with historicizing the *ʿumrān* relation between people and the world (IFK, 20). The scientificity of Ibn Khaldūn's theory of human sociality lies not in asserting the existence of objective laws

that determine its nature, but in his materialist conception of human sociality that is rudimentary for these objective laws (IFK, 33). Ibn Khaldūn's complex formulation of human sociality is made up of two inseparable components: on one hand, it is the relationship of humans to their world, and on the other, it is the relationship of humans to each other (IFK, 33). The claim of this materialist translation of this relationship is that the mode of human appropriation of their world – as in the material owning of the world and its production – is the main determinant of the form of the relationship of people, and vice versa (IFK, 33).

The celebration of Ibn Khaldūn's marriage of the history of human sociality to the social historical process is an articulation of Amil's insistence on the codependency of structure and history as elaborated in his system of contradiction. In this account, Amil locates the structural contradiction of a social formation within the historical processual contradiction – where the processual contradiction of forces and relations of production determines the structural framework of the social formation, or, mode of production, whereas the dominant political contradiction of the social formation can break the framework and allow the formation to transition through history. Amil reads his *determinant contradiction* into Ibn Khaldūn's science as: "history is precisely the movement of human *ʿumrān*, that is subjected, in its movement, to objective laws" (IFK, 33) and the *dominant contradiction* as: "the movement of sociality, the internal mechanism of temporality of society's transformation" (IFK, 21). Only through the discovery and understanding of this relationship, Amil claims, can the conditions of knowledge of the science of history begin and the theoretical logic of material reality be rendered conceivable (IFK, 33-4). Amil is locating the social relation as the kernel of the unfolding of history, but one that mutually determines the forces of production and is determined by

them. As such, a materialist analysis of the CMoP as a form of *ʿumrān*, must follow Ibn Khaldūn's footsteps in "synthesiz[ing] the social and the historical by observing the different forms of relations that humans form with each other through their relationship with the world" (IFK, 21).

4. Difference and contradiction

The structural and developmental unevenness behind the dominant and determinant contradictions, necessarily produce difference[368] (ikhtilāf). Contradiction, and the logic of antagonism, occupies a central role in Amil's thought and process – the most immediate example being that Amil substituted the Arabic term "نقد" (critique) by "نقض" (negation). As such, contradiction is not restricted to the historical laws of motion, but also corresponds to thought, the object of which is the production of a difference. In other words, Amil read Ibn Khaldūn's materialist understanding of causality and contradiction as a form of contradiction, which negates its predecessor, and in the process, gives birth to a difference. That is why Amil extends the notion of difference to the two indiscriminate parts of Ibn Khaldūn's unitary science. On the level of history, the difference is not on the level of method alone, but it is a differential understanding of history itself. On the level of sociality, the difference is a difference of the object of this science, between the event as empirically given, or as a materialist reality that requires the scientific extrapolation of the objective laws that govern it (IFK, 47). The is why Amil maintains that the difference is never simply on the level of method, but it is in the structure of thought itself, wherein the

[368] It is essential to understand "difference" in the Althusserian sense. Fredric Jameson defines difference as a "relational concept, rather than as the mere inert inventory of unrelated diversity." Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2010), 26.

method is the expression of the structure of thought. And in turn, this difference in the structure of thought is the natural expression of the difference in the structure of historical reality (IFK, 48).

Amil returns to his CMoP to establish that contradictions do not exist between different sects in Lebanon. Contradiction between sects cannot possibly exist if all the different forces are after the same aim: taking over a certain ruling-class position. The appearance of difference or contradiction actually conceals a similarity, that of the class fantasy of the 'national bourgeoise' ("burjwāziyya wataniyya"). Sectarianism is the specific historical form of domination that is brought to the fore during the Lebanese Civil War (IFK, p.74). It is only through undertaking this task of reading Ibn Khaldūn's thought by placing it in its own structure, and its own historical conditions, that there could be a proper materialist reading of Ibn Khaldūn. The materialist understanding of causality relies on the dialectic of identity and difference – wherein this difference in material relations (which in turn influences the structure of thought) – are the concealed causes behind the movement of history, and in this context, the cause behind difference in thought.

5. Relationship of thought to historical reality

Thought of reality proceeds by knowing its own laws based on its own necessity of the present in relation to the universal. The universality, however, does not locate historical knowledge outside of history, but shelters it within history, in relative terms to the universal. When these historical preconditions change, historical knowledge also changes (IFK, 17). Amil's claim is that this materialist understanding of history locates Ibn Khaldūn within his historical limits of knowledge: "As is in the current development of the theory of modern physics, one can read Newtonian physics and determine its historical

limits, one can delimit the bounds of historical knowledge and set its scientific character" (IFK, 17). This locus was instrumental for Marx in his own critique – the formation of political-economy as a distinct science cannot be read separately from the development of capitalism. Thought develops through its historical specificity, whether it is classical political-economy that focused on need and essentialized categories such as property, or a Marxist critique of classical political economy that asserted that political-economy was tied to the theoretical structure of its social structure (IFK, 75). In other words, one cannot think material conditions outside of the developments of the mode of production where this thought is formed. Amil locates Ibn Khaldūn's thought within pre-capitalist time by insisting that the different forms of production create their own legal relations and forms of government.[369] Therefore, the economic component of pre-capitalist modes had generally been concealed by the mechanisms of reproduction of those modes of production (IFK, 76). The economist in those societies had been necessarily close to the ruling feudal lords in societies of serfdom where labor was privatized, and property was socialized as part of feudal land. It is only through capitalism's mechanism of expansion that this repetition was interrupted and resulted in a transformation of economic thought. This socialization of labor and privatization of property came only after the social and historical elements of the scientific / industrial revolution (IFK, 77). It is only at this historical juncture that political-economists started seeking to understand the origins of capital, eventually resulting in a figure like Marx's whose contribution was to categorically critique the classical political-economist's assumptions.

[369] Karl Marx, "Grundrisse," in *MECW*, vol. 28, 50 vols., Marx Engels Collected Works (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010/[1857-61]), 25-6.

Marx's critique of political economy did not limit itself to articulating the importance of specifying the mistakes of political-economists and correcting them, but it tasked itself with revealing the causes pertaining to knowledge that made these mistakes possible (if not necessary). This is was only possible since Marx's historical reality was different from the ones of the subjects of his critique. Amil's views Ibn Khaldūn's contribution to the science of history vis-à-vis Ibn Khaldūn's predecessors as homological to Marx's own (IFK, 48). Marx's categorical critique of the method of political economists rejects the method of studying a country by starting from "population" or "capital" – the prior is an abstraction divorced from the understanding of the social classes it is based on, and the latter would be a misnomer if it were to be used without an understanding of wage-labor, value, money, and price.[370] Amil sees in Ibn Khaldūn's position a critical expression of his historical reality that breaks with his predecessors – this expression, although not Marxian in any sense, does not limit the independence of religious thought and places to the social relation in the middle of the larger historical unfolding. If the first (specific) accomplishment of Ibn Khaldūn was to indirectly affirm that his thought was more developed (contra his predecessors) due to its situatedness in its own more advanced historical reality, then the second (general) indirect accomplishment was to affirm Marx's dictum that understanding one's own forms of social organization is the key to understanding the preceding ones.[371] This position was the starting point of Amil's theoretical project of examining *takhalluf* – it was a *critique of takhalluf* as much as it was a contribution to its study. It is with all these elements that Amil could argue through Ibn

[370] Karl Marx, "Grundrisse," in *MECW*, vol. 28, 50 vols., Marx Engels Collected Works (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010/[1857-61]), 37.
[371] Ibid, 42. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *MECW*, vol. 11, Marx Engels Collected Works (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 37.

Khaldūn for the universality of history. This universality is the precondition of a science of history whose historical knowledge is relative to the historical limits of knowledge of its time (IFK, 18-9).

6. The universal and the specific

And by necessity, this science needs to be based on a coherent theory. Science is, after all, not distinguished in itself, but in the framework of a unitary theory of relations of understandings in one coherent structure that it is built on. Therefore, the object of a science depends on its theoretical constitution in relation to this science (IFK, 40). For Ibn Khaldūn, addressing the question of politics cannot be thought in seclusion from addressing *ʿasabiyya*, the state, domination, or relations of property and other concepts that *ʿumrān* set out to study (IFK, 40). A materialist analysis would require the study of all these interrelated concepts in the framework of a structural unity of theory (IFK, 40). Therefore, the science that Ibn Khaldūn is establishing requires the careful balance of addressing all that is necessarily encompassed through this structural unity of thought, without conflating the objects of study with other objects from other sciences (IFK, 41).

The Muqaddima deals with the problems plaguing the historical development of Morocco – such as the decline of Morocco in the 14^{th} century – and attempts to address these problems (IFK, 23-5). Amil looked into the work of Yves Lacoste, a prolific French geographer who engaged with Khaldūn's study of Morocco, to address how Lacoste's assessment of Ibn Khladūn overlooked a constitutive part of Khaldūn's science: universality. Whereas Lacoste attributed the problem of the Gold transport rail as the sole cause behind the 14^{th} century problem of Morocco, Amil reads Ibn Khaldūn's study as one that deals with the actual laws that prevented Morocco from reaching stability (IFK, 25).

Amil characterized these laws as having prevented Morocco from growing and instead having remained "incarcerated" within a circular and repetitive movement[372]: "the second the government reaches stability, it begins to fall apart as though it is hexed" (IFK, 25). Lacoste saw the Gold rail as the general problem that Morocco historically faced and was not content with Khaldūn basing his analysis on conditions separate from it (IFK, 27). Amil rejects Lacoste's characterization of this "hole in Khaldūn's thought" precisely because Ibn Khaldūn did not restrict himself to the 14th century (IFK, 27). Instead, Ibn Khaldūn penetrated the limits of historical reality to investigate what came before this problem, and what is behind it, through *ʿumrān*. Amil asserts that Ibn Khaldūn penetrated the limits of a specific reality in the direction of another necessary reality, that of theoretical reality. Without the theoretical, historical reality would not have been possible for Ibn Khaldūn to study (IFK, 27). It is through this process of looking to the theoretical to inform the empirical that Ibn Khaldūn's work is scientific: how the universal is distinguished in knowledge (IFK, 27).

Amil claims that Ibn Khaldūn affirmed the universality of knowledge as a precondition of – and simultaneously, a necessity for – its distinguishing. The knowledge of the concrete from reality (as in the specific) is not scientific as long as it does not maintain a dialectical relationship mediating it with the universality of knowledge. This scientific interconnection mediates Ibn Khaldūn's theory and empiricism (IFK, 27). Amil quotes Ibn Khaldūn: "From the causes of the general, to the telling of the specific" (IFK,

[372] Amil characterizes the CMoP as one that is governed by certain temporalities of structure, wherein at the slightest perceivable transformation taking place, a violent historical movement swoops in to restore it back to a state of "takhalluf." The concept of impeded history (tarīkh muʿāq) is a constitutive part of Amil's theory of periodization of history.

27).[373] Once again, another Marxian axiom is heard through the pages: "from the abstract to the concrete." In other words, the scientific knowledge of specific historical issues in Morocco is not possible except through the scientific historical bases of history – there is no history particular to Morocco without understanding the laws of movement of history. Amil deems the desire to produce a scientific knowledge of history without knowing the laws of universality of materialist history to be a mere empirical illusion (IFK, 28). It suffices to say that scientific knowledge of a specific historical issue, like Morocco's, is not possible except on a scientific theoretical bases of history (IFK, 28).

Amil views Ibn Khaldūn's strive for universality to be significant since this scientific view does not only enable the study of the history of Morocco alone, but its scientific import extends to understanding the East (IFK, 28). As an example, it is through this grasping of the internal mechanism of the movement of history that Ibn Khaldūn's theory of *ʿasabiyya* – and its role in state-building and consequently, the relation of *ʿasabiyya* and the general human process of *ʿumrān* – that allowed him to explain the history of non-Moroccan states such as the Abbassid and the Umawī (IFK, 28). This historical formation that lies between the universality of Khaldūn's historical theory on one hand, and the specificity of Moroccan reality on the other, has further fortified the efficacy of *ʿasabiyya* to a level of theoretical clarity never observed before in the East (IFK, 28). For Amil, this level of actualization is highly similar to the real historical actualization of capitalism in England as witnessed by Marx himself. Therefore, Ibn Khaldūn's relationship to Morocco is akin (with certain reservations) to Marx's relationship to Capital in both its universal element and particularly in the economic history of Morocco. Morocco was for

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[373] Based on page 7 from Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat al-ʻallāmah Ibn Khaldūn* ([al-Qāhirah]: al-Maktabah al-Tijārīyah al-Kubra, [19--]).

Ibn Khaldūn, the testing field of materialist historical theory, much like England was that of Marx's critique of political economy (IFK, 29). It is the grasping of the conditions of the specific, through its relation to the universal, that which allows for a systemic critique. Systemic critiques, Amil is arguing for Ibn Khaldūn, much like how Althusser argued for Marx, necessarily produce something new: a transformation of the theoretical structure.

7. Transformation of structure of thought

> [Ibn Khaldūn] moved with his thought from the field of knowledge to another one that did not exist before. However, this transition was not a simple transition to another field of knowledge, without changing the structure of thought in its method and its formulation of its object. This was not a transition, in other words, from "fiqh" to *ʿumrān*, for example, on the bases of similarity of the same structure of thought in these two different fields. He produced a difference in the structure of thought itself, between being in this field, and being in the other. His thought moved to its scientificity by moving to the *ʿumrān* field of knowledge.

Amil's attribution of a "revolution in science" to Ibn Khaldūn is not accidental. Amil is ultimately drawing a homology between the establishment of *ʿumrān* not as a mere critique of his predecessors, but the complete constitution of a new field of knowledge that did not exist before, with the revolution that Karl Marx inaugurated in his critique of political economy. According to Amil, Ibn Khaldūn's problems with the preceding historians or theologians is that they did not treat the issues for themselves, but they treated them by presenting them as examples to point to their own philosophical or religious 'sciences' (IFK, 39). Amil's direct quote of Ibn Khaldūn's on the latter's predecessors regarding "issues that are presented through way of demonstration for the people of science using [examples and] proofs," (IFK, 39)[374] is remarkably reminiscent of Marx's

[374] Based on pages 38-40 from Ibn Khaldūn.

following statement: "Political-economy proceeds from the fact of private property. It does not explain it. It grasps the material process of private property, the process through which it actually passes, in general and abstract formulae which it then takes as laws. It does not comprehend these laws -- i.e., it does not show how they arise from the nature of private property."[375]

Marx's theoretical revolution lies not in the mere critique of the methodological tools and theoretical knowledge of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and other political-economists, but in the establishment of a new field, a *science*, that is built on radically different grounds – or what Amil will call a different structure of thought (bunya fikriyya). Amil begins his doctoral dissertation, his seminal essays in al-Ṭarīq in 1968-1969, and his *Theoretical Prolegomena* with a comparable entreaty: to transform the structure of thought through a Marxism capable of understanding the colonial relation. Such a transformation that marks a sharp rupture from the old, is in other words, an epistemological break (qatʿ maʿrifī).

8. Epistemological break

In a concluding note, Amil speculates about the reasons that prevented Ibn Khaldūn's transformation of "science" into science from being recognized as a revolutionary rupture. He locates the source in the Arabic language: the word "ʿilm" (science in Arabic) signifies two radically different, if not contradictory, notions. Amil likens the pre-Ibn Khaldūn "science" to the French word "savoir" (IFK, 42). The difference for Amil – whose influence by French history of science is most evident here –

375 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *MECW*, vol. 3, 50 vols., Marx Engels Collected Works (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 270.

is that the "science" that preceded Ibn Khaldūn is closer to a form of "know-how" (IFK, 42). Amil stresses the need for historians to take this difference into consideration in order to be able to grasp the true materialism behind this newfound science (IFK, 43).

In practical terms, the validation of the news of events requires the measure of compatibility (motābaqa) to be applied at the location of events. If the science of *ʿumrān* finds the specific materialist bases, then reality proves valid for historiography (IFK, 31). This materialist position on history requires the explanation of history from within its own process, based on causes that are internal to it. The scientificity of this historicity of knowledge relies on the scientific character of thought and formalizes it by fist defining it and then constantly refining it in order to place it in the historical movement of knowledge (IFK, 26). Historical thought must have its own defined theoretical tools in order to not be limited to the realm of the abstract. Instead, it ought to be able to scientifically engage with a specific or concrete problem (IFK, 26). Amil emulates Bachelard's historical epistemology method in order to reach the concept of an epistemological rupture. This scientific process requires the precondition of a universal law in order to necessarily distinguish itself from the universal (IFK, 27). This specification necessitates another: the specificity of historiography between its appearance (maẓhar) and the scientific truth residing behind phenomena. History, therefore, becomes a science in its own process of searching for the causes overdetermining reality, and in turn, this produces a difference in method (IFK, 48). In other words, the scientific "leap," or epistemological "coupure," or "break" requires a coherent relation between the social and historical. It presumes a universal law in order to distinguish itself from and necessitates an understanding of causality grounded in the dialectic of identity and difference. Finally, through the transformations of the structures of thought, discontinuities are introduced which shatter

assumptions of a homogenous continuity of thought. A *coupure* signifies the fundamental materialist understanding of the structure of thought being a product of shifting material conditions, where scientific revolutions transition thought from one stage into another.

Epistemology constituted a formative role in Amil's theoretical practice. It was essential for forming the required system of concepts capable of theorizing the colonial relation. Amil appealed to the universality of Marxist-Leninist historical materialism in order to argue for the differential nature of the CMoP within the unity of capitalist contradiction. Aside from claiming the universality of reason and the non-reversibility of scientific achievement, he located epistemology, and science, within the political contradiction. The process of producing concepts "must find its conditions in the movement of class struggle in our society" (TKM, 22). The emphasis of epistemology's political character consequently makes claims over past struggle. As such, Ibn Khaldūn's introduction of materialist concepts into the science of history represented a revolutionary scientific moment – an epistemological break rupturing a "ʿāʾiq maʿrifī" (epistemological obstacle) – in the history of Arab thought. If Amil's symptomatic reading of Ibn Khaldūn revealed these aforementioned points that constitute the latter's scientific revolution, what can a symptomatic reading of Amil's symptomatic reading reveal? A few words to conclude.

E. Enter Ibn Khaldūn, Exit Edward Said

On the Scientificty of Khaldūn's Thought is an insightful, albeit vexing, book. A surface reading of this work would reveal its idiosyncrasies, repetitiveness, and weaknesses – and rightfully so! However, such a reading would disavow its radical negativity and would only reveal the partial truths of what it is not. Through revisiting the

tradition of Ibn Khaldūn's science of history, the book neither represents an advancement in Amil's historical theory, nor claims scientific relevance in returning to Ibn Khaldūn in 1985. Its thesis is not that Ibn Khaldūn pierced the veil of his present moment and traveled to the future in order to retroject concepts from Marxism, French historical epistemology, or structuralism. Amil does not make claims that this thought is authentic (asīl) in that its bases can be traced back to Ibn Khaldūn, or that it shares the same Arab particularity (khusūsiyya). It is also unlikely that this publication came as a response to the disenchanted ex-militants who found intellectual refuge in Ibn Khaldūn after abandoning Marxism.[376] It is, however, political through and through. Amil's return to Ibn Khaldūn in 1985 stands out in relation to his other publications precisely because it is the dialectical counterpart of his symptomatic reading of Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism*. Perhaps this reading shed better light over my conversation with Evelyne Hamdan:

> He had been wanting to publish for a while. He wanted to publish it, but he was not able to. He did not have the time. For sure there is a reason, but I will need to look. I do not know why. No one has asked me this question before, so I will need to think. Of course, there is a reason. When they used to talk about translation, he used to say that the first thing you ought to translate is the Ibn Khaldūn text. Let me think and then get back to you. I never asked myself this question. He wrote this book in the same moment that he wrote the book on Edward Said. The book he wrote on Said, I know it was published then because he was responding to Said's book. But Ibn Khaldūn, I am not sure…[377]

Ibn Khaldūn was not the first figure whose thought Amil read symptomatically. Amil's overall project is premised on Althusser symptomatic readings of Marx, as well as his own endeavor. In addition to his symptomatic reading of Marx, Amil published an

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[376] For more on this, see Fadi A. Bardawil, "Chapter 3 - Exit Marx, Enter Ibn Khaldun: Critique In The Wake Of The Lebanese Civil War," in *When All This Revolution Melts into Air: The Disenchantment of Levantine Marxist Intellectuals* (Colombia University, 2010), 155–218.

[377] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

article and two books: a two-part article on Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*[378] (1964), the book on Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* (1985), and the notorious book on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1985).[379] Although Amil's reading of Said is highly critical, it nonetheless proceeds to map out the unconscious of Said's project. In the process of bringing Said's theoretical and ideological frameworks to the fore, the Saidian *problematic* is revealed and treated in a method akin to his treatment of Ibn Khaldūn. Despite Amil's intimation of the ideological basis of *Orientalism* – by pinning the Saidian project as diametrically opposed to the rational and materialist scientific critique of ideology – a *problematic* is, however, not a *weltanschauung* or a worldview. It is the absence-presence of problems and concepts within a certain thought that could only be analyzed through what is not immediately present on the surface. Put differently, if the presence of the aforementioned outlined scientific concepts is what made Ibn Khaldūn's thought scientific, then by the same token, their absence from Edward Said's thought is what makes it un-scientific (if not ideological). The aforementioned concepts, which Amil used to draw the materialist contours of Ibn Khaldūn, are precisely the exact same concepts that Amil critiqued Edward Said for lacking.

Despite the different conclusions Amil reached in the final pages of both *On the Scientificity of Khaldūn's Thought* and *Is the Heart for the East and the Mind for the West? Marx in Edward Said's Orientalism*, the method of reading and the *problematic* are the

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378 Hassan Hamdan, "La Pensée Révolutionnaire de Frantz Fanon," *Révolution Africaine*, no. 71–72 (June 6-7, 1964).

379 It is worth noting that Amil's symptomatic reading of the Ibn Khaldūn is based on 12 pages (pp. 3-4, 6-7, 35-41) from the *Muqaddima* (IFK, 83-93). Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat al-'allāmah Ibn Khaldūn*. Amil's symptomatic reading of Edward Said is based on 4 pages (pp.170-3) from the Arabic translation of *Orientalism*. Edward Said, *"Al-'Istishrāq: al-Ma'refa, al-Sulta, al-'Inshā,"* trans. Kamāl Abu Dīb, 1st ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Abḥāth al-'Arabīyah, 1981).

same. If Amil's reading of *Orientalism* reached the conclusion that Said's Foucauldian method "forecloses the possibility of producing new concepts" since it was restricted to "change within the pre-existing epistemological field, not its transformation" (MES, 71-2), then it failed to register a "*difference* in its relationship to its preceding thought, and remains within the dominant bourgeois thought" (MES, 74-5). The two readings are dialectically intertwined, not in politics and epistemology, but in science and ideology – or rather, in materialism and idealism. This is after all what distinguishes the projects of Amil and Hussein Mroue's of reading Arab thought and philosophy from the sycophants of Arab "turāth" [tradition]:

> Materialism was not invented by Marxism, nor did Marxism invent it. It is as old as philosophy itself, renewed in various forms by the renewal of the perpetual struggle between it and idealism. It cannot therefore be confined to Marxism, which has a specific historical form, that is its coherent form. (Only Marxism is consistent materialism). This means, in other words, that materialism is not one (IFK, 77).

EPILOGUE

> History is not the past. History is the past in so far as it is historici[z]ed in the present – historici[z]ed in the present because it was lived in the past.[380]

> Over and above the logical loop evident in the melancholic conversion of privation into acquisition is the spectre of acquiescence which would – this is Hegel's beautiful soul – embrace the present in the gratification of its own despair. There is nothing neutral about the drift to compensatory gratification.[381]

In light of what I have learned from this project I would like to addressing some of the problems of a '*history without documents*,' and its relation to 'vexed decolonial archives.'[382] El Shakry is right in seeking to constantly scrutinize the contours of these 'objects,' but one also needs to not find themselves as part of the signifying texture of their 'subjects.' They confuse subject-object relations and as a result, complacently assume a position of melancholic disenchantment – the attachment to the ungrievable loss of an object that was never there to begin with. However, one needs to proceed with caution in proposing an 'alternative' to this melancholia, which is manifest in a manic drive to collect, archive, record, and museify. Rebecca Comay warns against the drive to remember memories that are not ours – in surrogate memories, objects, places, bodies, and

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380 Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller ; 1 (New York, NY London: Norton, 1991), 12.

381 Rebecca Comay, The Sickness of Tradition, p.90 Rebecca Comay, "The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism," in *Walter Benjamin and History* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2005), 90.

382 Omnia El Shakry, History without Documents Omnia El Shakry, "'History without Documents': The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East," *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (June 2015): 920–34, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.3.920.

memorials: "[t]he structure of melancholia in this way begins to bleed into that of fetishism – the compensatory construction of imaginary unities in response to a traumatic loss ('castration') which structurally can be neither fully acknowledged nor denied."[383] It is also paradoxically dangerous to evade the melancholic present and focus on the "reconstruction of the disparate 'horizons of expectation' and 'indeterminate futures',"[384] for this historical practice displaces the very loss of the absent object and defers it to a future temporality – as always already having been in the future. In both instances – the melancholic attachment to an inexistent object and […] – the absolute terror induced by the traumatic kernel of the Lebanese Civil War remains incarcerated under the veil of memory. The expression "tinthakar w-ma tinʿād" [remember, so as not to repeat] captures the paradox of recognition, which, as the very gesture of disavowal, vouchsafes this repetition. Crisis of historiography is not discontinuous from the crises it attempts to periodize. To recall Marx's famous line on the repetition of history: "[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[385]

Two years before the civil war, in April 1973, Amil penned an article for al-Ṭarīq titled "On Political Theatre." In it, he employs his own reading of historical tragedy, Brecht and the role of *Verfremdungseffekt* (التبعيد) to distinguish between 'political theatre' from 'bourgeois theatre.' He argues that tragedy is the realization of the movement of

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[383] Comay, "The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism," 90.
[384] El Shakry, "'History without Documents,'" 934.
[385] Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," 103.

contradictions within social formations through class struggle. In theatre, it is the farcical repetition of tragedy that realizes tragedy (FMS,[386] 130). Political theatre, through *verfremdungseffekt*, makes visible the farcical repetition of tragedy (FMS, 133). Tragedy, for Amil, is not individual or subjective, but belongs to the stage, "a play within a play" – it overturns the Master/Slave dialectic (FMS, 134). The viewer becomes a master of the master's game in this particular form of "knowledge production" (FMS, 135). While Amil's article was intended as a review of a play written and directed by Abd al-Mulk Isawi and entitled *al-Bayt al-Ḥudūd* (The Border House), he only dedicated the last few pages to explicitly discuss the play. In these, he critiques the playwright for employing a "simple contradiction" between the protagonist "'I'" [«أنا»] and his house (FMS, 140). Instead, Amil writes:

> A truly *tragic* movement is one of differentiation, struggle, contradiction, specification and it is contrasted within 'I' in particular, and its house, which eradicates it. Sufi identification with myth is an ideological fantasy which must be dissolved. It is with the *death* of the 'I,' *not through it*, that the revolutionary process begins (FMS, 141).

Fantasy fills the place, through debilitating hesitation, between the intention of doing something and its actualization.[387] It is not incidental that Amil's references to "tragedy-comedy" [al-maʾsāt – al-mahzala], are often identified with Hegel's Master / Slave dialectic [jadaliyyat al-sayyid wal-tābiʿ]. Amil referred to Hegel as "ṣāḥib al-fadl" [the man behind, person to whom credit is owed] the "problematics of authenticity and modernity" (AHA, 174).

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[386] Mahdī ʿĀmil, "Fī al-Masraḥ al-Siyāsī / في المسرح السياسي," *Al-Ṭarīq: Majalla Fikrīya Siyāsīya* 32, no. 4 (April 1973): 129–41.
[387] Vladimir Il′ich Lenin and Slavoj Žižek, *Lenin 2017: Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through* (London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017), xl.

As Alberto Toscano writes, revolutionary tragedy could benefit from a treatment that moves beyond a consideration of the ethical dimensions of malaise (generative claims on *conditions* of disengagement) or reconciliation.[388] Omnia El Shakry's assessment of tragedy is reconciliatory, as is evident in her ahistorical intervention of dissolving differences between Marxism and Islamism on the grounds of a supposed shared 'goal:' "[Marxism and Islamism] thus occupied the same discursive terrain or problem-space, namely the rejection of a centrist and reformist anticolonial nationalism in favor of a revolutionary mode of decolonization."[389] Tragedy is not only immanent to the contradictions within revolutionary processes, but is only perceivable from within these very contradictions. It is located at the level of collective historical experience and is in relation to a fidelity to unfolding potentiality that is colliding with specific historical forms and relations. In all various permutations, tragedy is not reducible to an individual ("The Great Man") but is of the historical stage. Nonetheless, its effects appear in personal relationships. My three interlocutors, Evelyne Hamdan, Elias Shaker, and Youmna El-Eid shared stories that conveyed the explosive effects of social antagonisms in personal relations. For example, Shaker told me that before the war,

> [intellectuals] used to sit down to discuss their research among one another – what they were doing, what each one thought. Their screams used to come out. The entire neighborhood used to hear them call 'you are petit bourgeois' to one another before grabbing a drink together and continuing their discussion. This was the atmosphere and Amil was part of it.[390]

[388] Alberto Toscano, "Politics in a Tragic Key," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 180 (August 2013): 32.
[389] El Shakry, "'History without Documents,'" 933–34.
[390] Shaker, Elias. Interview by author.

The war broke this relation and transformed it into "if you're not with me, then you're against me. And we cannot even talk with each other anymore."[391] In 1986, Amil was invited to be a respondent for his colleague, Karim Mroue, in a roundtable event held at the al-Ṭarīq offices. Amil prefaced his critique by saying:

> [M]y task will be challenging. Discussion from a different intellectual site is different. It is easier and more enjoyable. It has another flavor which I relish: I frolic and take pleasure, and I brawl with an adversary who has already conquered on account of his difference.
>
> As for the discussion from within the very same site, and on the grounds of the very same thought, it is trying and arduous. It is serious, there is no room for jesting. The logic of its thought lies in trying to produce knowledge that aspires to be effective within the historical process, that of the revolutionary transition to socialism.
> [...]
> The object is a vast and rough terrain, I approach it with apprehension. With hesitation too. But it is the nature of this thought – I mean its necessities to be militant – that imposes this venture. It also imposes, in its logic, discussion. I mean critique that is, from within, a movement that advances thought. This is how this thought advances: every time it ventures, it is strengthened with criticism that impels it towards a greater venture. This is how knowledge acquires its historical character ["tataʾarkhan," then liberates itself from the framework of a theoretical language that inhibits it, and therefore discovers, through its liberation, its errors. And the movement of history, in thought, is like the movement of history in social reality: a liberation movement in a transformation movement. It is a revolutionary movement *par excellence*. Whoever dares [to critique] is its victor. He realizes it, therefore breaches it. And its logic is always a struggle against the established obstacles (HTW, 31)

In its polemical tone and format, Amil's *Naqd al-Fikr al-Yawmi* has become a template for representing the tragic crisis of the war. However, it would be misleading to over-contextualize (and over-sensationalize) the individuals Amil addressed in his tirades. Here I take seriously Evelyne's disclaimer that his attacks against figures was not personal, "but [attacks against] their thought."[392] This is not to suggest that 'things were not as bad'

[391] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.
[392] Hamdan, Evelyne. Interview by author.

then, nor to deny the obscenity of wartime polemics – they most definitely were obscene. It is rather to say that to reduce Amil's writings to a historicist and subjectivist system of discursive 'checks and balances' misses the fundamental nature of those polemics. Amil's attacks were precisely attacks on the affective embeddedness of the gestures of symbolization that this 'collective effervescence' authoritatively invoked within collective practices. They were prescriptive writings on politics, which did not only take a distance from moral considerations but were also targeted at intellectuals who problematically conflated politics with morality. This polemic is most clearly exhibited in Amil's two books, Azmat al-Ḥaḍāra al-ʿArabīyya am Azmat al-Burjuwāzīyāt al-ʾArabīyya (1974) and Naqd al-Fikr al-Yawmī (1988). They were polemical, antagonistic, and obscene works. The obscenity of the former book lied not in the content of the question it posed, but in the non-innocent character of its question. Amil's question entailed an attack on the impotence of authority. The obscenity of the latter book lied in pitting itself against the supposed radicalism of the ethical turn. It is as though the terror of the war – and its tragedy – for Amil, was simultaneously the outcome of a "historical necessity" meeting its obverse. Obscenity, which reveals the impotence of others, is not one-sided, as it also functions to expose the ignorance of the speaker.[393] To simply characterize Amil's theoretical enterprise as provocative[394] would deprive the war of its real tragic character. Nowhere is

[393] The drive behind Amil's provocative and difficult questions makes not only the recipient indirectly responsible for the impotence of substantiating their reasoning, but it also makes the subject posing the questions responsible for their own impotence. Alenka Zupančič, Lying on the Couch: Psychoanalysis and the Question of Lying, from Cultures of Lying: Theories and Practice of Lying in Society, Literature, and Film, p.155-168

[394] A friend of the Hamdan family, who was present in my meeting with Evelyne, shared with us how she was often jokingly confronted with the accusation that "[her] uncle reprimanded (بهدلنا) us." She then explained that "this is probably why [Amil] used to argue with people about everything. He wanted to because this was how knowledge advances for him."

this more evident than in Amil's earnest tone in the following paragraph from his introduction to the "On the Sectarian State" (1986):

> The war is two: a war by your nemesis, and a war against him. War never had a single logic, nor a single front. [The war] within the civil war is inclusive of all fronts. Perhaps within the front of thought, [the war] was more brutal and more destructive. It is as though you [are forced to] think through the thought of your adversary. This is a fatal blow. I mean that it nullifies every distinction separating your thought from that of your opponent. But how does thought stand, if not through difference? The war of words is more grievous [أدهى]. It is through words that your opponent tempts you until you fail [يوقع بك]: He will enchant you [يطربك] to cripple within you the ability to use reason for critique. Therefore, you surrender, if so, to the premises of his thought, which he introduces as intuitive givens, and you slide to his positions. Thus, he robs you of the effectivity of your thought and you remain, even within your epistemological intellectual activity, captive to the premises of his thought. It is therefore imperative to critique. (FDT, 10).

Indisputably, distinctions between ideological positions cannot be reduced to sameness. The historian is not bearer of responsibility to reconcile the past, particularly if it entails disavowing the radical negativity of critical practices. "Kawwaʿ, kawwaʿ ktīr" [deserted, a lot of people deserted] Youmna El-Eid recalled that during the war, "a lot of them used to be communist and they deserted."[395] For both El-Eid and Amil, the problem was not in this desertion *per se*, as much as it was in the subsequent reduction of thought to a mere stylistic effect, which posed a threat to the transformative force of critique. El-Eid added:

> you could not do any form of 'naqd jaddī' [serious criticism] of the novel. They would immediately get upset. As in, they assumed that 'you are now against me.' They'd tell you that your language is beautiful. They'd say it is 'adab' [literature]. In the end, they would [preface their comments subjectively with] 'I, [proper name]' or 'I have an opinion.' What could you say in this case? Tell me! You could no longer use thought in critiquing literary work.[396]

El-Eid's reservation toward this shift in tendency in thought is not moralistic but analytic. In her 1993 book on literature and writing during the civil war, she sought to explore the

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[395] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.
[396] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

reasons behind this ‘silence’: “is it not a symptom of the repressed, what is not divulged?….It is through this silence, through what is repressed and not said, that some poets opposed the war. They went on a speech strike against [the war].”[397] The poststructuralist and postcolonial procedures have involved, on the one hand, reading theoretical texts as literature and, on the other, searching in literature for a theory of its own functioning.[398] These procedures, which equate literature with theory, disavow any claims to truth (desire) in favor of a universalized aestheticization that reduces truth into one of the “style effects of discursive articulation” – the exclusion of the ‘truth-dimension’ for a textual mechanism of ‘truth effects.’[399] This is perhaps why El-Eid insisted in telling me to “read Naqd al-Fikr al-Yawmi [to] see what Mahdi was doing.”[400] Amil’s project was an attack on the “empty speech of discourse” [فراغ القول] (NFY, 40). He diagnosed it as the dominant trend of the civil war period: “it is an exercise in composition [الإنشاء], in which words come to relish [تتلذذ] other words, in an empty movement that vulgarizes the Hegelian dialectic” (NFY, 43). Far from undermining criticism, poetry, and literature, Amil was concerned with how to read the “repressed of discourse” [مكبوت القول], which is displaced when those works become politicized. For Amil, politics overdetermines writing and is not external to it. What is ‘repressed’ for Amil (and not symbolizable through discourse) is real politics (السياسة) as opposed to what Amil designated as “the political”

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[397] Yumnā Al-ʿīd, *Al-Kitāba: Taḥawwul fī-l-Taḥawwul: Muqāraba lil-Kitāba al-Adabīyya fī Zaman al-Ḥarb al-Lubnānīyya / الكتابة: تحوّل في التحوّل: مقاربة للكتابة الادبيّة في زمن الحرب اللبنانيّة* (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 2018), 197.
[398] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), 171.
[399] Žižek, 172.
[400] El-Eid, Youmna. Interview by author.

field of class struggle.[401] This finds resonance (albeit in a different register) in Walter Benjamin's critique of

> the attitude to which there is no longer, in general, any corresponding political action. It is not to the left of this or that tendency, but simply to the left of what is in general possible. For from the beginning all it has in mind is to enjoy itself in a negativistic quiet. The metamorphosis of political struggle from a compulsory decision into an object of pleasure, from a means of production into an article of consumption that is this literature's latest hit.[402]

There is a minor Benjaminian resonance detectable in Amil's earlier writings. In a review of a book on the history of the socialist movement in Egypt (1972), Amil separates 'history' from the 'past' and locates lost causes and political struggle at the center of reading and writing history:

> Appropriating history through appropriating the world inherent to it – the former necessitates the latter – for the past extends to the present as alive and affective, and through [the present], [the past] is read, and from [the present], [history] is written. Here lies the importance of writing history, and therefore reading it (BAH, 38).

However, if this history is merely a reified image of the past from the position of the victor,[403] then Amil sees "its danger, for it casts a light on the present that determines it in the logic of a procession towards what is ahead" (BAH, 38). Amil continues: "we have come to know our history through this distorted history, so we have had to return [to the past] to rewrite it […] and science alone [represents] this very demarcation" (BAH, 39). He concludes: "reading history, therefore, has an immanent relationship to its realizing in

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[401] The addition of the article "al / ال" [the] in the form of "the political" essentializes politics (NFY, 55).

[402] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London; New York: Verso, 1998), 425. Cited from Sami Khatib, "Melancholia and Destruction: Brushing Walter Benjamin's 'Angel of History' Against the Grain," *Crisis and Critique* 3, no. 2 (May 9, 2016): 28–29.

[403] Sami Khatib, "Where the Past Was, There History Shall Be: Benjamin, Marx, and the 'Tradition of the Oppressed,'" *Anthropology & Materialism*, no. Discontinuous Infinities (March 7, 2017): 7, https://doi.org/10.4000/am.789.

its present, through a complex process of class struggle" (BAH, 56). These excerpted lines on reading the past and writing history, which are located in the final pages of the *Theoretical Prolegomena* – later reprinted and included as the last item in its appendix – indicate that the relationship between history and documents is that between class struggle and thought. As Alenka Zupančič points out, lost causes have always been lost. The task is of finding them:

> thought is not the opposite of action, but rather the inherent condition of a properly courageous action that eventually makes a difference. This would also imply rediscovering the "lost cause" in a new way: there are no lost causes, in the sense of causes that were originally lost. There are only refound causes, causes found again, causes that emerge at the site of something that never was—that never existed—but which we are nevertheless able to recognize.[404]

[404] Alenka Zupančič, "The Apocalypse Is (Still) Disappointing," *Lost Cause ("Repetition/s")*, S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique, no. 10 & 11 (2018): 29.

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